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A TOURIST IDYL

AND OTHER STORIES.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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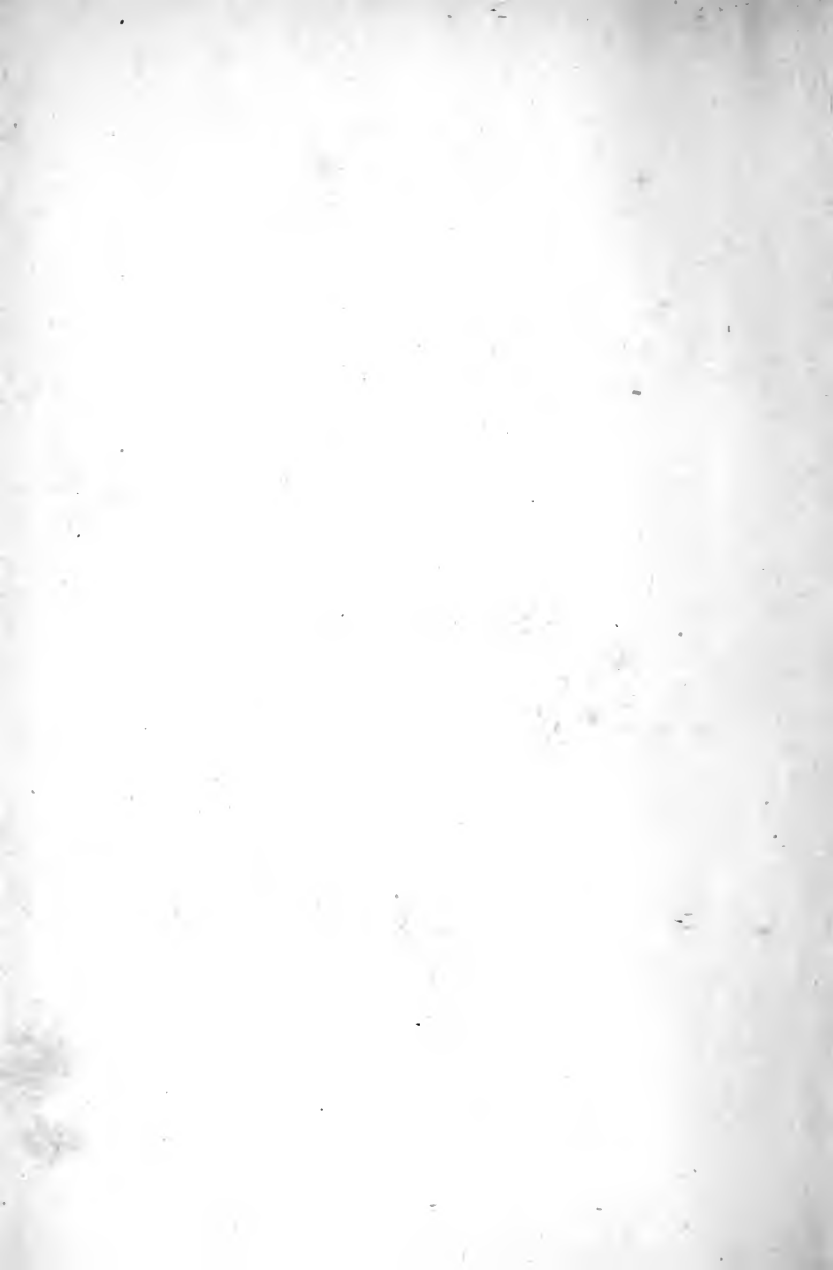
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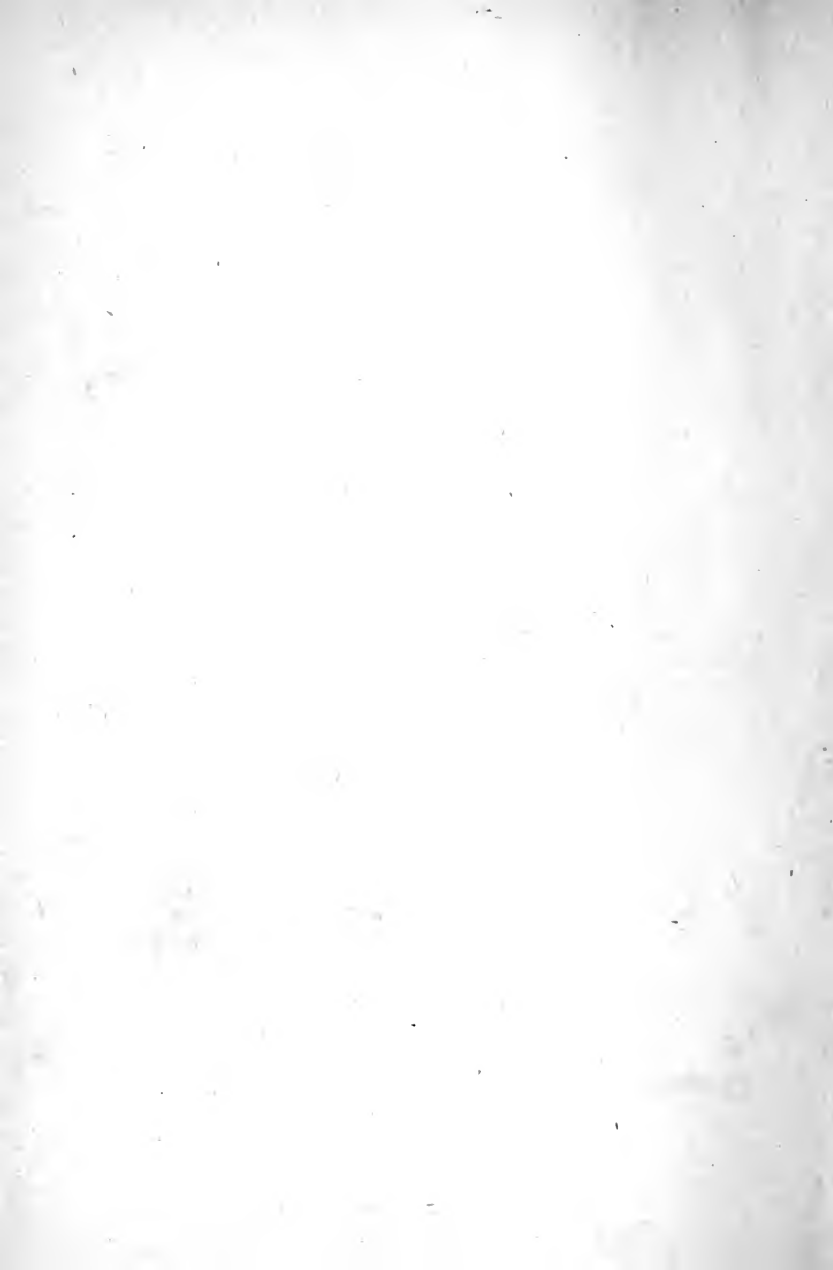
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PREFATORY NOTE.



OF these six sketches, one only, "Bice," has appeared before. It is here reprinted by kind permission of the Editor of *Temple Bar*.



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A TOURIST IDYL.



A TOURIST IDYL.

I.

EUSTACE, younger son of Chester, younger son of the eighth Baron St. Quentin, was to meet his father at Baden-Baden early in August. He was himself on his way home from India, where, after some ten years in the Civil Service, his health had given way, and he had furnished one more instance of the perfection of our present method of supplying our Indian executive with the sound mind in the sound body. "Thank heaven, it is not my mind," was poor Eustace's one consoling reflection in the grief—the anguish—for, in his peculiar circumstances, it was anguish—of being compelled, after months of suffering and endurance, and manful battling with his fate, to finally abandon his Indian career. He had chosen it, not only

because exceptional abilities marked him out for the distinguished success in it which was almost within his grasp when he broke down, but because it afforded him effectual opportunity of escape from an uncongenial home. There was no real necessity for his adopting any profession, his father being a wealthy man, with only two sons and a daughter to provide for; but apart from his desire to break loose from his early associations, Eustace was not the man to be content with the idle life he had been allowed, nay, encouraged, to look forward to. As a boy, he had been thoughtful, intellectual, ardent, ambitious. He had been bred in the country, but he had early perceived that the slaughter of animals, as a calling in life, had its shortcomings; he loved exercise and open air, but, as a boy, he had made the discovery that a considerable expenditure of muscular force and a large consumption of oxygen were quite compatible with going out and—killing nothing. In these circumstances his *raison d'être* as a country gentleman was gone. What was to be done? The other alternative of being a man about town, and mere club-idler or carpet-knight, had even less attraction for him. Politics and diplomacy were indeed open to him; and his father, who was himself a member

of Parliament, would have done his best to help him on in either, though with some cynical astonishment that a young man, who was not compelled to do anything but enjoy himself, should care about a career at all. But, then, politics would have kept him at home—even had he seen any possibility of deciding with which party to cast in his lot—and he did not care about diplomacy, which he called mere international hide-and-seek and mendacity on a grand scale. If it had tended to avert war—which was murder on a grand scale—he would have tolerated it as the lesser evil of the two; but since he could not perceive that the principle of arbitration or any other first principle of international morality was likely to be much furthered by it, he preferred the less equivocal if more humdrum occupation of helping to govern our principal dependency. This he had striven to do equitably—too equitably—in theory at least, said certain people, who could detect in him a dangerous tendency to regard Indian affairs from the point of view of the people of India. But all his dreams and projects, and all the healthy delight which a vigorous mind brings to even the routine tasks of every day, were shattered now. He was back in Europe a social wreck, a failure, a disap-

pointed man—all the more disappointed because the voyage had already so far benefited his health as to cast grave doubts upon the infallibility of the doctors' fiat. He had fallen in readily enough with his father's request that he would meet him in Germany. It mattered little to him, in his depressed and heart-sick mood, where he went, or what he did; only, upon the whole, he knew that he wished to postpone his return to England as long as he decently could.

But something had delayed Mr. Chester St. Quentin's movements, something which was not fully explained by his letters, and which puzzled his son as he waited, kicking his heels, so to speak, at Baden-Baden. At length, having exhausted the nearer excursions round that picturesque "slop-basin," as it has been irreverently but not untruly called, Eustace proposed to himself a trip of a day or two to Heidelberg, of whose fame as the most beautiful spot in all Germany he had frequently heard.

The weather favoured him. The only fine warm days in a summer of cold and wet that drove tourists to despair, that froze them in Switzerland, drowned them in Italy, and depressed them everywhere, were the days he spent at Heidelberg. He was beginning to find

some content, even some joy in life again, when a forwarded letter from the Englischerhof at Baden recalled him, somewhat against his will, to the "slop-basin."

It was towards midday when he found himself at the Heidelberg railway station, amid the stir and bustle of the arrival of the train which was to take him to Baden. The platform was crowded with hungry travellers, in search of the refreshment afforded by a German station. This refreshment, it may be observed by the way, always takes the same form—that of a very large fossil breakfast-roll, cut in half, and enclosing what appears to be part of the sole of a shoe. A sort of thin broth is occasionally, but very rarely, to be had on application at the *buffet*, but this passengers are largely debarred from enjoying by a certain want of unanimity on the part of German railway officials on the question of "*Aufenthalt*." A nervous apprehension, lest the man who said "*Drei Minuten*" may turn out to be better informed than the man who said "*Zehn Minuten*," tends to the renunciation of broth, and perhaps to a rash supplementing of the fossil sandwich by the hasty purchase of some of the grapes of commerce, and a few curiously solid plums.

Eustace, pitying those doomed bewildered

travellers, looked out for an empty carriage, and had ensconced himself in the corner of what looked like one, when his eye fell on a small heap of alpaca on the seat beside him—a woman's light dust-cloak, with a knot or two of brown ribbon about it. On the seat opposite lay a Baedeker, and overhead, as he discovered, on proceeding to look about him, were stowed a hat-box, a lady's hand-bag, and a bundle of umbrellas and wraps. His first impulse was to change compartments. He had grown a little misanthropic in his trouble, and especially he avoided the species tourist whenever he could. He wanted to meditate, and these people would be sure to address him ; he wanted to read, and these people would be certain to chatter. But he had not risen to his feet when a bell rang loudly, and an increased racing and scuffling on the platform, together with emphatic bellowings on the part of the officials, announced the immediate departure of the train. It was all but in motion, and Eustace was beginning to wonder what had happened to his tourists, when the door was flung open, and a stolid guard, with a heavy blonde moustache, pink cheeks, and an imperturbable expression of countenance, half thrust, half lifted three breathless, excited, and terrified persons into the

carriage. He seemed nowise disconcerted by the vehement expostulation addressed to him, in English, by the middle-aged gentleman who headed the little party, and who clearly failed to see the point of the *Dreiundzehnminutenspass* (it is permissible to coin a German word for the distinctively German amusement). Nor did he move a muscle for the pathetic remonstrances, murmured under her breath in literary German, by the elder of the two young ladies who accompanied the indignant gentleman. Nor did the terrified face of the younger one, who was on the verge of crying, melt his Teutonic features to the semblance of pity, much less extort from him anything approaching to an apology. He merely slammed the door and vanished, leaving the victims of his practical joke to recover themselves as best they might.

“It’s disgraceful! It’s abominable! Did you say that was the very scoundrel who said ten minutes? Impudent rascal! He ought to be cashiered. Are we in our own carriage?”

The indignant gentleman glanced anxiously round him till his eye fell on his hat-box, the sight of which appeared to mollify him a good deal. He even began to chuckle, in his relief, over the practical joke.

“The third time it has happened in three

days," he remarked. "But that was the narrowest shave of all. I hope you wigged the fellow that time, Rachel, though you didn't seem to make much impression."

The elder of the two girls laughed softly.

"I told him we had been misinformed," she said, in a voice singularly gentle, yet with bright tones in it that revealed much sunshine in her soul; "but I'm not quite sure that he understood me."

"How like Rachel!" exclaimed the younger girl, who was leaning back in the carriage, flushed and panting, and fanning herself with a folded newspaper. She was a beautiful girl, but very young, scarcely out of the hoydenish stage, when a certain *abandon* of attitude and of conversation is still maintained—with intimates, that is to say. In society, the maiden of seventeen, prematurely snatched from the school-room, will often display a curiously exact imitation of the *grande dame* imperturbable manner. She will sit very upright; will freeze at the proper times, just as her mother does; will smile a very little—not laugh—when she ought. The only difference between her and a veteran—if she is as passionate as a girl of seventeen should be—will be a certain scared look in the eyes, quite perceptible to the

sympathetic observer. It was evident that the scared look often came into this girl's eyes when she was on her best behaviour. Now, when she was at her ease, they were quick and restless, betokening a fair share of the paternal excitability.

"How like Rachel!" she repeated, in a loud clear voice, ignoring the presence of a stranger with the audacity of seventeen. "Told him we had been misinformed! That is Rachel's idea of a scolding. I wish I knew German. He wouldn't have been let off so easily then."

While she was speaking, her father, who up to that moment had scarcely noticed that there was another person in the carriage, threw a critical glance at Eustace. He was not long in perceiving, with the shrewdness of an experienced observer, that, certain shortcomings of dress notwithstanding, this new fellow-traveller might safely be appealed to for a little of that masculine sympathy which is always so desirable in the case of grievances of a public nature. The wrath of one's women folk is grateful, but they are not trained to the intelligent indignation of a man and a voter.

"Cool hands, these German fellows!" he remarked, addressing Eustace. "Do you mind both windows down? It's hot to-day. Very cool

hands. I am inclined to think that State control is not an unmixed boon."

"No doubt it tends to apathy on the part of the public," said Eustace,—“of the German public, at least. But they are used to a condition of pupilage. It is astonishing what they will submit to.”

“Ah! an English gentleman, I thought so,” said the other to himself complacently.

Said Eustace to himself critically, “An English gentleman of a sociable turn, and rather excitable temperament. I am in for it now.”

But as the conversation proceeded, meandering from the German to the English railway system, and thence to politics, and thence to public men, and thence to half a hundred general topics of the day, Eustace began to conceive a liking for his loquacious fellow-traveller. He was a good-looking man of fifty-five or thereabouts, with grey hair and beard, kindly blue eyes, and the girlish complexion of the country-loving, open-air loving Englishman. Presently he began to talk of Ireland as though he were familiar with it; and Eustace immediately decided that he had maternal relations there, and that it was some strain of Irish blood in him that accounted for his genial

manners, his warmth of temper, and a certain grace and charm which could draw mere strangers to him, and even fascinate an unhappy, surly Diogenes like himself.

Meantime the two young ladies had taken up their books, and seemed quite undisturbed by the lively conversation that was being carried on by the gentlemen. The elder one, especially, seemed absorbed in hers. She started, when her father addressed her suddenly.

“Where was it they made that infamous charge for *bougies*, Rachel—Antwerp, or Brussels?”

“It was Brussels, at the Belle Vue,” she said, colouring slightly in her surprise, and letting her book fall on to her lap. “We were only there one night,” she went on, turning to Eustace, beside whom she was sitting; “but they gave us three large gloomy bedrooms, so that we were tempted to light both our candles. We were all very tired, and I am sure we did not burn half an inch of them, but the next day we were charged six francs for *bougies*.”

She smiled, the very sweetest, frankest smile Eustace thought he had ever seen. If he had liked the father after five minutes’ conversation with him, he liked the daughter the first moment she opened her lips. He had seen a

number of young ladies in England and in India, but he did not recollect to have met with one before whose manners to a stranger were so prepossessing. His impression was, that most girls in her position would have replied briefly to the question addressed to them, and become immersed in their book again. He liked this girl for seeming aware that there was another person besides her father in the carriage; he liked her for looking at him, Eustace, when she replied; for behaving quite as if they had been introduced at a friend's house (only rather more kindly than most people behave on such occasions); for not regarding him as an interloper, a possible ogre, or an escaped Fenian.

He looked at her with quite a new sensation of mingled curiosity and interest. He found that she was not pretty, but pre-eminently, superlatively sweet, and that her face was one of the most mobile and expressive faces that he had ever met with. He omitted to note the colour of her eyes; but he observed that they were full of brightness, and had a kind of transparent candour, which was a new thing to him. It was not the transparency of a child's eyes, which is sometimes thought the most beautiful thing in women; it was—though

Eustace did not know it then—the yet more beautiful candour which is born of courageous thought and of a reasoned loyalty to goodness.

He answered her with an eagerness that contrasted rather strangely with his recent soliloquy about noisy tourists.

“That is often the only really serious imposition in one’s hotel charges,” he said. “I wonder what led to the fashion of ‘taking it out’ in candles. Do you think it can be a prejudice on the part of the pampered tourist in favour of brand-new unused candles? For my own part, I would rather pay my franc to any person who would burn the first inch or so for me.”

The girl laughed gently, and even the seventeen-year-old sister, who had been freezing for some time, suddenly discovered something highly amusing in her novel, and laughed, too, ostensibly at that.

“Yes, indeed,” said the elder one. “The long straggling wicks take one five minutes to light.”

“And five minutes more are gone before they begin to illuminate the gloomy halls you speak of,” went on Eustace. “Oh, I can hardly suppose that even a Russian prince would

knowingly pay a couple of francs for such a privilege as that! I am afraid it must be sheer extortion. I think in these co-operative days one might get up a Tourist's International Anti-Bougie-Imposition Union."

"Yes; and all go to second and third rate hotels, till the first class ones are reduced to beggary and a proper state of penitence."

"Fancy that gorgeous gentleman, the proprietor, and that still more magnificent person, the *portier*, prowling about their deserted halls, beguiling their leisure with the Anti-Bougie-Imposition Union Journal! Imagine them reading how H.R.H. the Duke of So-and-So, how Princess X——, how the Marquis of Blankshire, and the Grand-duchess of Hohenstauffen-Stielen-Schlangenbad and goodness knows what besides—all patrons of long standing—had joined the Union."

"I should feel sorry for the *portier*," said Rachel. "He is very grand, but he is generally very obliging, and he knows everything, and he is such a good linguist."

"He is a person whose rare accomplishments and whose lofty status are apt to be underestimated by the inexperienced traveller," said Eustace. "There was an old gentleman at Heidelberg, where I have just been staying,

who certainly had not a due appreciation of them. I happened to be close by when he was tipping the *portier*, after a stay of a week or so; and what do you think he gave him? One mark and the nickel coin which in this country represents the value of one penny farthing! He did not seem at all offended. He is too much of a gentleman for that; but as soon as the donor's back was turned, I saw him exhibit the two coins to a friend in his out-stretched palm with an expression of infinite glee on his face."

"I must say I sympathize with the poor old gentleman. We find the nickel coins most confusing," said Rachel, with a merry look at her father, who had taken up the *Times*, and took no notice of the innuendo. It was a four-days'-old *Times*, to be sure, but what of that? It was still the *Times*.

"I heard afterwards that this gentleman's financial operations were renowned in the hotel," continued Eustace. "It was his habit, when any small payment was required, to produce a handful of coins of mixed English, French, and German origin, and to select from them the one that looked most like what would have been appropriate on a similar occasion in his native land. His eyesight not being quite what it was, such a trifling

distinction as that between marks and francs, or between silver and nickel quite escaped his notice. On the very day of the episode with the *portier*, the chambermaid was seen embracing his knees and kissing his hands in a transport of gratitude. It appeared she was a country girl fresh from the fields, and had been so overwhelmed with his munificent donation of eight marks that—she showed it ! ”

“ Perhaps her people were very poor, and she was so very glad to have something to send them,” said the young lady, quite forgetting to laugh at the eccentric Englishman.

Eustace gave a little start, then he smiled.

“ Have you the second sight ? ” he said. “ You are quite right. I found it was so from the girl herself.”

After that there was a pause of a few moments. Rachel took up her book again ; and Eustace, finding that his three companions were all reading, pulled out his book—a pocket volume of Emerson. But he did not read a word of it. He presently put up his eye-glass, a weapon upon which he had been miserably dependent ever since those terrible examinations, and proceeded to look about him a little. The result of his survey was to the effect that a combination of soft greys and browns makes

a very pretty and becoming travelling-dress, and goes well with softly-tinted cheeks, and soft hair, unstiffened into anything beyond its waves of natural beauty; but that sweet eyes were better meeting your own in frank and cheery converse than glued with too much ardour to a printed page.

This was the young man who had so strong an objection to chattering tourists.

II.

AT Oos, the junction for Baden-Baden, passengers for that place are required to change trains, and it is here that you encounter the first symptom of the Sybaritic luxury, which still characterizes the ex-queen of European gambling resorts. Apparently the same tender care which made roads as smooth and trim as garden-walks, planted the common wayside with exotic shrubs, and clothed the flymen in the resplendent liveries that awed Mark Twain, provided the little Oosthal railway with roomy saloon-carriages, filled with velvet-covered armchairs and sofas. Into one of these Eustace helped his fellow-travellers, carrying some of

their things for them, in the absence of any *Gefolge*, as the German visitors'—lists grandly denominate a bewildered lady's maid or helpless valet. He was about to follow them himself, when he noticed that the saloon was almost full, and this and a certain diffidence, which was one of the characteristics of his complex nature, and which usually seized him when another man would be gaily and justifiably pursuing his advantage, caused him to lift his hat and retire.

The instant he was gone, the younger of the two girls nestled up to the other and whispered excitedly in her ear, "Oh, Rachel! What shall I do? I am so ashamed of myself! I did behave so badly at Heidelberg! I thought at first he was a stupid old German, or—or—a stupid American, and I fidgeted so, and talked such nonsense! Do you think it mattered? He is very badly dressed, though he is so nice and gentleman-like. I like him awfully; don't you? Oh, dear, I wish I wasn't always so silly. Don't you wish he'd got in with us?—I do."

"Yes; I wish he had," said Rachel, with composure. She would have scorned any affectation on the subject.

"Well, perhaps he's going to our hotel." Then, with a great sigh, "What a great idiot he must think me! When shall I get nice

manners like you, and talk to people, instead of being shy and glaring like an owl?"

"Don't despair of yourself just yet, Margery," said the other, with gentle satire. "It's early days. I'm sorry you couldn't have another year in the schoolroom as you wished, but, you see, it was lonely for me."

"Of course, you dear old thing. If only you would teach me not to be an owl," said the beautiful child, with the quaintest, disconsolate expression on her dainty face. So Rachel had to spend the remainder of the little journey in reassuring her charge—she had mothered Margery since the two were left motherless in the nursery—and soothing the over-vivid self-consciousness which at present made poor Margery's newly emancipated life a burden to her.

Eustace, meanwhile, was gnashing his teeth in a neighbouring compartment over his own folly in gratuitously parting company with his new friends. They had certainly shown no signs of being weary of his society; on the contrary, the "genial Celt," as he now mentally denominated the head of the party, had looked quite vexed when he took his leave of them. He had evidently wished to take up the thread of a dialogue that had been cut short by the stoppage at Oos. They had got upon

India, and Eustace had begun to wax eloquent on a theme that touched him nearly, the more so that he found his Celt fairly well-informed about Indian affairs, and not crammed with prejudice and insular bias like the large majority of Englishmen. He regretted his agreeable and intelligent interlocutor; he also regretted—— Eustace did not formulate the remainder of his regret, but it was sufficiently pungent for all that. With a vehemence quite disproportionate to the occasion, he cursed in general terms his own singular constitution—the shyness, or the self-distrust, or the misanthropy, or whatever it was, that always caused him to draw back when the sense of enjoyment was at its keenest, and made him, as it were, the executioner of his own happiness. It was always the same, whether it was a question of the passing pleasantness of a summer's day, as in this instance; or of a turning-point in life, as when, a couple of years before, in India, he had abstained from asking a girl he liked to be his wife from some foolish scruple about unworthiness, and found out afterwards, accidentally, that she had liked him better than the man she subsequently married.

To divert his thoughts, Eustace pulled out his father's letter, which he had read badly at

Heidelberg, and re-perused it. It began with apologies for having kept him waiting so long.

"I may as well be frank with you, my dear boy," wrote the Honourable Chester. "I had reason to suspect that the atmosphere of Baden was vitiated by the presence of a certain family which I need not name. I only heard this since proposing to go there myself, and it took me some time to ascertain whether the rumour was well-founded. I am told now, on good authority, that the Viper and his party have really elected to honour Homburg with their salutary presence. This decides me to join you immediately. But I shall be grateful to you to scan the visitors' list minutely, in case of accidents. If I am obliged to spend a night in the same town with him, take care, at all events, that I am not quartered in the same hotel. As you know, I would rather sit down to table with the devil himself."

Then followed some details as to route and probable date of arrival, and then the signature. Turning the page, Eustace discovered for the first time the following postscript, "Your mother and sister desire their love."

That was the first greeting that he had had from either since he set foot in Europe.

"I suspected something of the kind," he said

to himself, pocketing the letter with a sigh. "I saw it was something he wouldn't have mentioned if he could help it; but he could not refrain at the last moment. The bare possibility of any mistake about the Viberts going to Homburg put him into a fever, and he resolved to take me into his confidence, the better to guard against remote contingencies. What a curious craze it is! To think that after thirty years he should hate poor Vibert as heartily as the first day! Well, they say it is a merit to be a good hater. But for a man of the world! A man who is pledged by his social creed to feel nothing strongly, not even dislike. It is the oddest anomaly—a most unaccountable kink in an otherwise sufficiently harmonious character."

If Eustace's musings over his father's character were more just than filial, he was to be excused, in a measure, on the score of the singular disparity between the two men, a disparity that had made itself felt when Eustace was in the nursery, and often caused his father jestingly to announce his belief that his second son was a changeling. It was certainly not from him or his mother that the boy inherited his extraordinary notions, his pious fads (he had been wont to hold frequent prayer-meetings with the baby), his ridiculous radical ideas (he had

had a "concern" from infancy about the poorer cottagers on the estate), his sentimental nonsense about trapping hares and shooting pigeons, and, indeed, inflicting pain of any sort on the lower animals. His brother took these things as matters of course, like a true-born English gentleman. Why should this little prig pretend to be wiser than his betters?

So it came to pass that the little prig had been snubbed, suppressed and repressed in every conceivable manner, but, having a strong nature, he had never been extinguished. The snubbing had given a very slight tinge of bitterness to a nature originally as sweet as it was strong and full of lovingkindness; but that was all.

The train had arrived at the Baden railway-station, and there was a rush and a clamour, a hot competition among rival hotel omnibuses, and a feverish identification of luggage. In the thick of the fray, Eustace caught sight of the grey dust-cloak, with knots of brown ribbon, and felt a strong desire to go and offer his services. But again he held back. Was it not an impertinence to suppose that these people could not get on without the interference of a stranger? The "Celt" was able-bodied, and the young ladies (one of them, at any rate) had heads on their shoulders. They would probably

have brought a retinue if they had been averse to or incapable of sorting their own baggage.

So, having rescued his own portmanteau, Eustace stepped into a half-full omnibus, and took his seat. He had scarcely done so when he became aware of an anxious pair of eyes glancing nervously at him from behind a barricade of bundles and bags. He smiled and bowed to the young lady called Margery; but she responded with a terrified appeal.

"Oh, do you think they will be in time? They put me here, and went to see after the luggage. And people keep coming in so fast, their places will be gone."

"We will try to keep two for them," said Eustace, soothingly, intending to surrender his own, for one, if necessary.

But as he spoke a large party of British tourists, real tourists, the genuine species Eustace loved so well, poured into the omnibus, stormed it, so to speak, and speedily filled every available inch of space remaining. In vain did Eustace courteously inform them that "a gentleman had secured two more seats in it, and if they would be so kind— They were dividing a party——"

"Ah, young man!" interrupted a massive gentleman, with a scarlet face and a magnificent diamond breastpin, shaking his head sagely,

"It's a case of first come, first served, I take it. Parties that don't wish to be divided didn't ought to separate."

"There's no reserved seats 'ere!" said a loud woman who was worthy of being, if she was not, his spouse; and they both began to laugh noisily over the situation, or their own wit.

It was intolerably hot. The afternoon sun was beating fiercely on poor little Margery's back, and transforming the omnibus—already an oven on wheels—into an almost unbearable place of torture. Two large wasps had found their way into it, and seemed to have an especial leaning to her corner. Overhead a succession of thunderous knocks and bumps brought her heart into her mouth at least three times every minute. This kind of thing, when one is tired and deserted by one's natural guardian, is not so easy to bear with fortitude, and Margery had to bite her lip to keep the tears back. She was debating with herself whether she should get out, or wait a few minutes more for her father, when all of a sudden the door was slammed, and they were off at a pace only attainable by a heavily laden hotel omnibus.

"Oh, what shall I do? What shall I do?" cried Margery, startled into a general exclamation of despair.

Eustace hastened to respond, lest any one else should do so.

“Don’t be alarmed. They are sure to follow immediately, and will join you in the entrance to your hotel. Will you allow me to tell the man which hotel?”

“Thank you, very much; the Hollande,” said Margery, very gratefully; but still she looked terrified, and Eustace resolved not to lose sight of her till she was safely under the parental care again.

The omnibus was cleared by the time the Hotel de Hollande was reached, and Eustace was able to take his charge and her impedimenta out of it in comparative calm.

“It is very surprising,” he remarked as he did so, by way of taking the situation lightly and composing her ruffled nerves still further, “how such people as our friend with the diamond pin have the opportunity, and still more the inclination, for travelling! They give one the idea of being sufficiently moneyed for many happy days at Rosherville, but hardly for this sort of thing. And that they should care for it is so odd! People without education, without culture of any sort, without the common courtesy, which makes intercourse with one’s fellow-men endurable——”

He paused to give directions as to his baggage, and then turned with his companion into the entrance of the hotel, where they stood and watched the omnibus disappear round the corner in the direction of the Angleterre.

"I have been greatly struck," he went on, "by the change in this respect since I was last on the continent, ten years ago and more. A much larger proportion of the lower middle-class appear to travel and to find travelling enjoyable than in those days. I can't help thinking they do it merely to ape their betters, and that if they were honest with themselves they would go to Ramsgate or Southend. Perhaps they find compensations; but it is piteous to think of what they must go through. Their sufferings from the heat alone are sad to contemplate."

"No," said Margery, sweetly, not with intent to negative his proposition, but because she was too preoccupied to hear a word of what he said. Then, turning to him suddenly, "Is this your hotel, too?" she asked.

"I am at the Englischerhof. I have sent my traps on."

"Oh, I am so afraid I am keeping you! It is very good of you, but I am quite safe now. They will be here directly. Please don't let me keep you."

But all the time her eyes were saying quite plainly, "I am as frightened as I can be. For goodness' sake don't leave me alone."

"I am in no hurry, if you will allow me," he said, answering those anxious child-like eyes; and he went on talking all the nonsense he could think of, to show her what a very natural thing it was for a young lady to be stranded on the doorstep of a strange hotel, in the sole keeping of a strange young man. At the same time he was beginning to wonder himself what had happened to that other laggard omnibus.

The Sophien Strasse wore the drowsy, deserted aspect of a watering place on a sultry afternoon. The stir created by the arrival of the train had subsided; a few of the gorgeous carriages before mentioned, the drivers in scarlet waistcoats and silver buttons and hatbands, were to be seen taking visitors to and from the grateful shade of the Lichtenthaler Allee; a very few foot passengers were strolling along the pavement; two women, with large baskets full of Marshal Niel rosebuds, were languidly offering their wares on a bench close by.

Margery's eye fell on the beautiful treasure, and she interrupted a remark of Eustace's with a little cry of delight.

"Oh, dear, that is like home! How pleased

my sister would be! She is so fond of Marshal Niels!"

"Let us go and get some to make your room look home-like," said Eustace; "it will pass the time."

But before they had stepped out on to the pavement a *packdroshke* turned the corner and drew up at the Hollande, and Margery's father and sister got out of it, with faces only less anxious than Margery's own. The girl flew out to meet them, and, in the midst of a torrent of talk, clearly found time to whisper how good and kind "he" had been. For her father immediately turned to Eustace, and thanked him effusively for looking after his daughter, adding that he was distressed to think he should have done so at some inconvenience to himself.

"Not at all; my hotel is close by," said Eustace. "I am most glad to have been of any service. These little *contretemps* are alarming to all but hardened travellers."

"And she has never crossed the channel before."

"But what *did* happen to you?" said Margery.

"We could not get attended to," her sister answered; "and at last, when every one had gone off, yourself included, and we had got half way

in a cab, we found my portmanteau had been left behind after all."

"I thought it was on the omnibus, but Rachel assured me it was not," said her father.

"Well, there it is safe," said Margery, looking affectionately at the pile of luggage that was being transferred from the cab to the hotel. Eustace glanced at it too, as he bowed his farewells, and noted that the initials on the portmanteau in question were R. M. V.

"Can they be the Viberts?" he said to himself, laughing at himself before the notion had fairly flashed through his brain, for the absurdity of supposing that every English visitor to the continent whose name began with a V. must be Mr. Austin Vibert, his father's *bête-noire*. Had Vernons and Veres, Verrekers and Veseys no right to travel in Germany without being confounded with a family which—according to Mr. Chester St. Quentin, that is to say—ought to have been, if it was not, placed without the pale of polite society?

The true history of the St. Quentin-Vibert feud, over which Eustace naturally pondered a good deal as he strolled towards the Englischerhof, mounted to the third storey, and alternately unpacked a few things and gazed at the glorious view from his open window, was as follows.

Chester St. Quentin had, sorely against his will, been compelled to go into business, at a time when business was not, as it is now, the almost universal refuge of ex-officers of the army, younger sons of peers, and even connexions of royalty. He was the pioneer of the scores of youthful patricians who have since discovered in the wine trade, especially, a profitable and not wholly unhappy career. His father was poor, and had insisted on his availing himself of an opening which, after a very brief period of probation, was to make him a full-blown partner in a rising concern. The other partner, Austin Vibert, was under certain obligations to the St. Quentin family, which made him willing to take a more or less untrained hand, with only a modest capital, into the business. Moreover, he hoped great things from the connexion this young scion of nobility had it in his power to open up, if he did but choose to work it properly; and, after all, he had a cool head, a shrewdness and knowledge of mankind quite remarkable for his years, an appreciation of the value of money worthy of a city man (though he knew how to spend it, too)—in short, a business faculty which was not the less apparent to his friends because at present unsuspected by himself. What he had to get over

was, the prejudice against trade inherent in his blood and intensified in himself by personal idiosyncrasies. The despotic will of his father having carried the day, Chester presently saw fit to keep this personal distaste in abeyance, and set himself to work, since trader he must be, to be as successful a trader as it was possible. The one cross that no power of earth or heaven could have compelled him to submit to patiently was failure, and he would no more have endured to be a mediocre man of business when he entered the city, than previously he would have endured to be the second-best dressed man in London. Expediency was his rule of life, and his end of life success; and though the same thing may be said of a great number of persons, they are, generally speaking, more careful than was Mr. Chester St. Quentin to call their rule principle and their end duty. The god of his devotion favoured him, and he and his partner worked together happily for several years, rapidly getting together what is known as a West-End connexion of considerable magnitude, that is to say, furnishing the cellars of most of the leading clubs, great mansions, and even royal residences of London.

Yet the two men never really liked each other. Austin Vibert was the son of a wealthy

merchant, and, in consequence, obtained his start in life at an early age. He was only a few years older than his partner, nearly as good-looking, and almost as proud of his success with women, though less cynical and less heartless in his behaviour to them. The result was a latent rivalry, not to say jealousy, between the two young partners, which burst into a flame when Vibert succeeded in securing the hand of an heiress to whom both were paying court. Here was failure—the first in a life of uninterrupted success, failure patent to the world, especially galling to *amour-propre*, and never to be forgiven to Fate and Austin Vibert. Chester hinted foul play, and was meditating a challenge, when a totally unexpected contingency transferred the attention of both men for the time being from private to business matters. They discovered that their business premises had risen enormously in value owing to the erection of some public buildings in their immediate vicinity. They had received the offer of a very large sum for their freehold, and had agreed that it would be well worth their while to close with it, when Vibert's lawyer quietly announced that the whole of the money would legally accrue to his client, since there was nothing in the terms of the deed of partnership

to warrant the transfer of half, or indeed of any portion of it, to Mr. St. Quentin. The contingency, being unforeseen, had been unprovided for. Now, but for the unfortunate straining of personal relations, the matter might have been amicably settled. A due allowance would probably have been made for Chester's moral claim, and the affair would somehow have been adjusted, and on no account permitted to occasion the dissolution of a partnership advantageous to both claimants. But Chester, smarting under what he considered deadly personal injury, was aggressive, defiant, and coldly insolent. When he saw that he had no legal case, he demanded that the thing should be settled as between "men of honour, if indeed the term could be applied to a person who," etc., etc. The other, naturally incensed, would bate no jot of his legal claim; and so it came to pass that instead of a coolness there was open war; instead of a duel a threatened, and indeed, attempted horse-whipping; and, of course, an instant and final separation.

Thirty years and more had passed, and the sting of that twofold defeat still rankled in the breast of the elderly capitalist and politician. He had soon married another heiress, and gone into another "good thing," had made money

with rapidity, and refrained from gambling it away; had bought an estate in one of the home counties; and had got himself returned for Parliament. He had never failed again in any department of life. On the contrary, he was pointed to as one of the most successful men of his day, one of the shrewdest, cleverest, and, his enviers said, luckiest. But there was no one found to say that he was one of the best.

III.

AFTER dinner that evening, Eustace found himself strolling in the direction of the Sophien Strasse. The feeling of solitude that had deepened upon him since he left, amid physical suffering and weakness, the cheery, kindly circle of acquaintances and friends in the Presidency town near which he had been stationed, had pressed upon him with greater force than ever during the noisy tedious *table d'hôte*. There seemed to be only Germans in the hotel. Certainly at the dinner-table there were Germans to left of him, Germans to right of him, Germans in front of him; and though Eustace knew German, and had been an ardent student of Goethe in his time, it

is one thing to shed tears over the prophetic insight and exquisite beauty of Faust, and quite another thing to embark in a discussion in idiomatic German of contemporary politics with your neighbours at *table d'hôte*. So Eustace occupied himself all during dinner with turning over in his mind the events of the day and the chances of his delightful Celt turning out to be in very truth that social pariah, that Viper, that Ishmael—Austin Vibert. By the time the acid grapes and green peaches that did duty for dessert were handed round, he had discovered that it was his obvious duty to ascertain the truth without delay. His father would be arriving the next day, and, to say nothing of his annoyance, were Eustace to disregard his express injunctions, it would be most embarrassing for himself to be meeting these people everywhere, and to have to choose between gross rudeness to them and incurring his father's wrath by—however distantly—recognizing them. Of course it was preposterous to jump at the conclusion that they were the people Chester St. Quentin had come to Baden to avoid; still the age of Eustace's fellow-traveller would correspond to that of Austin Vibert: both men had grown-up families, and though he had never seen Vibert,

Eustace had always heard of him as a "plausible, smooth-tongued scoundrel, who was the devil and all to pay when his blood was up." Now, this might very well be an enemy's description of the genial but impulsive person who had joined the train at Heidelberg. There was no question about it. Filial duty compelled a visit that very night to the Hotel de Hollande.

No; the *portier* knew of no such name in the hotel. There was no one there of the name of Vibert. A family of that name had not arrived there that afternoon? The *portier* thought not, but he would see. Several English families had arrived in the afternoon. He dived into his office; but before he came out again two other persons, with urgency written on their countenances, dived in also, and Eustace was left waiting for some minutes in the passage. As he loitered there with a faint hope that he might catch a glimpse of some faces that he knew, yet with a most unreasonable dread lest he might be considered to have come to the Hotel de Hollande with the object of catching such a glimpse, he heard a loud clear voice on the staircase, saying, "Father will be tired of waiting for us."

There was no mistaking Margery's voice. No one but a girl fresh from an English

country home would have talked so loud on a Hotel staircase. But Eustace had turned his back and retreated into the *portier's* office before the two young ladies appeared in the hall. There were times when this young man, who was not so very young, and who had had plenty of experience of the world and its ways, and who was the son of a father noted for "push" and the serene self-confidence which the world likes better than worth, had all the shyness of a girl. It was a horrible thought to him, the bare notion of thrusting himself upon these strangers, all the more horrible that they had attracted him so strongly, and that their simple friendliness had acted like a balm in his depression and solitude. The *portier* having dismissed the other two supplicants for his good offices, the one with a torrent of German, the other in voluble French, was turning to Eustace with an English address, when who should enter but the genial Celt himself, extending a couple of keys, and desirous to know whether a certain letter which he had expected to find at Baden could still arrive that day. He greeted Eustace with the warmth of an old friend.

"I suppose you are going over to the band? Come across with us."

“You are very kind.”

Again the *portier*, brimming with information, sought to gain Eustace's ear, but he implied with a hasty wave of the hand that his business could wait, and hurried after his new friend, lest the man should reveal his errand, or indeed say anything pointing to inquisitiveness on his part regarding any sojourners in the hotel.

“I had a little business here,” he muttered, rather inanely. “This seems a nice Hotel.”

He did not hear the other's rejoinder. The truth was, there were two faces in the hall so fresh and sweet, so fair and gracious, that it was impossible to listen at the moment to commonplaces about Hotels. There is a mysterious law of feminine etiquette which ordains, no doubt for very sapient and cogent reasons, that ladies shall don their soberest garments at foreign *tables d'hôte*. But these two sisters were country lasses, untravelled, and unversed in the arcana of the feminine social code; and they were clad in white from top to toe—fresh white gowns, white hats, and white wraps over their arms—for the evenings were chilly, even when the days were hot. Their gowns were very gracefully and prettily, but not fashionably, made. There was

wanting about the dress of both certain touches, apparent to the experienced observer, which add nothing to the beauty and harmony of a woman's attire, but which indicate that all the mind she has has gone to the designing of it.

"It has been most kindly proposed that I should accompany you to the *Conversations-haus*," Eustace said, addressing the elder of the two girls.

Again he was almost startled by the sweetness of her smile, as she murmured the permission his manner, rather than his words, had asked of her. It was difficult to him to believe that she did not even know his name. He supposed that he had not the air of an adventurer; but even people whose names were known and who were not adventurers were usually treated with more coldness until something was known of their incomes and—in a few cases—of their antecedents.

He was over-diffident, no doubt, this poor Eustace. He did not know himself that he had "gentleman" written in every line of his thin, bronzed face, and that no one could be five minutes in his company without recognizing in him one of those chivalrous, fair souls who would have been Guyons and Galahads in days

of yore, and who do deeds of prowess still, only without the guerdon and without the glory.

“Are you all alone here?” Rachel said, as they strolled a little way behind her father and Margery, along towards the *Conversationshaus*.

“Quite alone at present. But—I am expecting my father to-morrow.”

“Oh, you will be glad!”

“We have not met for ten years. I have been away in India ten years.”

“So you were saying. You must miss all your Indian friends very much. I have always heard there is so much pleasant society in India.”

“It does make it seem very strange to be alone,” said Eustace. “And yet I did not go out very much. Besides my work——”

He paused. It seemed priggish to tell her that he was a keen student of Sanscrit, and had spent most of his leisure trying to gain some knowledge of the “elder sister” of Aryan languages and literatures. There is nothing more hateful to a man, at the same time clever and modest, than a parade of intellectual tastes in general society. No man, Eustace thought, could gain anything in a young lady’s esteem, and he

might lose a good deal by owing to a fondness for Sanscrit. So he substituted, "After hard work, one likes time to oneself."

By this time that enchanting double row of shops was reached where trinkets, and gloves, and Black Forest clocks, and photographs, and fifty things besides, attract the loiterer to and from those deserted halls, where the voice of the croupier and the chink of the fugitive coin resound no longer. Margery had put her arm through her father's, so as to prevent his walking on too fast, and enforced a long halt before each stall as she passed it. She was in ecstasies. There was nothing like this in West Norfolk. There was only one shop worth speaking of in all King's Lynn, and Margery's home was too far from Lynn to allow of her visiting even that shop very often. Eustace and Rachel stopped in like manner before the treasures displayed to view on the next booth. In order to see these beautiful things properly, the short-sighted old Indian was obliged to have recourse very often to his eye-glass; and now and again, when his companion bent over some toy or trinket, or quaint bit of *bric-à-brac*, he might have been observed stealing a furtive glance through it at her face.

It is curious how much people who suffer from defective vision can take in during the brief moments when they really get a good sight of a person. These moments are precious; they occur at rare intervals, and they cannot be protracted on pain of rudeness; but they often seem to be turned to far better advantage than are the wider opportunities of ordinarily endowed mortals. In this case, at any rate, Eustace St. Quentin knew more about this girl from six peeps at her, so to speak, than all the long-sighted gentlemen she had met, who could see her nicely every time they happened to glance in her direction, had done before him. He began to feel an invincible desire to know something more about her, especially to find out whether she were in truth his hereditary enemy. If her name were Vibert, why, then, there would be nothing for it but instant flight. An odd smile flitted across his face as he thought of mediæval feuds, and of the beautiful legend of Verona. Ah, the days were past when Montagus and Capulets settled these things with swords and daggers, with potions and poisons, and delicious death in one another's arms. To court one's Juliet to-day meant being civilly boycotted by one's relations, and being cut off with a shilling, and bringing the most prosaic nineteenth-century

misery and discomfort upon a dainty, delicately nurtured creature.

“Do you know,” began Eustace, craftily, peering at a photograph of some villa in the environs of Baden, “that is not at all unlike my home? It is a style of architecture that is a good deal affected about us. I don’t know whether you are familiar with it.”

“Oh, we are very old-fashioned in the part of Norfolk where I live,” Rachel said, innocently falling into his trap. His heart sank. As far as he knew the Viberts lived somewhere in the Eastern Counties. “There are nothing but old red-brick ‘Halls,’ dear quaint old houses, with more of the farm-house than anything else about them.”

“And you live in one?”

“Yes; in one of the prettiest, we think. It lies in such a sweet little valley, and we can see the village with its thatched roofs nestling close to us—such a peaceful scene.”

“But you have plenty of neighbours?”

“Oh no. We have none very near us. We are very quiet. My father, as you see”—here she smiled—“is very fond of society, so that we often have people with us, and he goes away a good deal.”

“And do you go away a good deal?”

“Not much. I can always find plenty to do at home.”

“There is always plenty to do in the country,” said the wily Eustace, by way of a leading remark, “if people’s tastes are not vitiated by artificial modes of life. It is the natural life, after all. If you care for trees and flowers, for animals, for the open air——”

“I love them all!” Rachel interrupted, with enthusiasm. “Besides, in the country you can always get plenty of time for——”

She paused. If a young man hesitates to announce to a young lady that he devotes his spare time to Sanscrit, how much more reluctant is a young lady to confess to a young man that she devotes hers to Greek! It is, perhaps, no longer a positive drawback to a girl to know a little; but there is still a certain flavour of forbidden fruit about it, and it will take a generation or two more to get the “prunes and prisms” theory of feminine education thoroughly out of the national system. Rachel had lost an admirer or two through her Greek already. Not because she was not entirely natural and womanly and sweet with it all, but because the mere knowledge that she was “learned” acted as a deterrent. She could not be at all sure that this new friend of hers,

whom she liked exceedingly, would not like her less for worshipping Euripides. So she, too, decided to substitute a vague generality. "In the country," she said, "you can always get plenty of time for indoor pursuits."

But she was not to be permitted to escape so easily.

"Is music or drawing your *forte*?" inquired her companion, with an assumed carelessness, the conventional questions he was asking having a greater significance to himself than he wished her to guess, or indeed than he admitted to himself.

"I draw a little; but I think I read more than I draw. Listen!" she exclaimed, blushing at the notion that after all she had branded herself "blue," and hastening to turn the conversation. "What a lovely waltz that is! How I love a band out of doors in the evening!"

"Father says we may have some coffee ices," said Margery, turning round to her sister.

Rachel laughed. "She is such a baby," she said, in a merry aside to Eustace.

It was no easy task to find a table. They were all crowded with Germans, who stared and made remarks under their breath at the little party of English people. The English are few and far between at Baden now, and

these white-robed maidens and their father and friend found themselves actually conspicuous.

"Is there anything the matter with us?" said Margery, in an anxious whisper to Rachel. Her acute self-consciousness was always on the alert. "They all stare very much. Do you think it can be because we are not dressed queerly as they are, and they think we ought to be?"

"Perhaps our white is a little conspicuous," said Rachel, simply. "I didn't think of that."

"I don't like the Germans," said Margery, with dignity. "It ought not to surprise them to see an English lady."

As soon as the ices were eaten, it was deemed advisable to walk about, for the evening had turned very cold. It threatened rain. Every one agreed that the brief spell of fine weather was at an end. Margery took her father's arm again. She seemed to think he had talked enough to Eustace, chatting uninterruptedly as the two men had done for half-an-hour about Indian politics and Indian public men, and a variety of kindred topics not specially congenial to seventeen. Rachel she considered stupid that evening. She had declined to converse with her in undertones while all this dull Indian talk was going on. So Rachel was consigned once

more to Eustace's care, and once more they followed a little distance behind the other two, pacing all about the gardens and round and round the kiosk, where the band was playing.

"I did not know it could be so cold in Germany," said Rachel; "and it is such a contrast to the heat we experienced this very afternoon."

"You must always allow ten degrees extra for the railway carriage," said Eustace. "There has been no real hot weather since I have been in Germany, and now, it seems, we are in for some more wet. Baden was very unpleasant when I first came, so showery and chilly and yet muggy. I fear you will not enjoy it very much if that sort of thing sets in again. You don't seem able to breathe shut in here among the hills, far less can you get up sufficient energy to climb them. Then the damp and even cold prevent anything like the *dolce far niente*—lying in the shade with one's book and dreaming of all the enterprising things you will do when it is cooler. But perhaps you are only passing through?"

"No; I think we shall stay, if we like it," Rachel said. "We may, perhaps, go to Freiburg for a few days, and we shall try to see all we

can of the Black Forest. But my father is not fond of too much moving about. He likes being where there are people; and if he once finds a Hotel that suits him, with, perhaps, some friends in it——”

“I thoroughly agree with him,” said Eustace, with inappropriate warmth. “Give me any place where you meet your friends, be it Stepney or Sahara, and the rest signifies little. Scenery is all very well as an adjunct.”

Rachel smiled. If she had known Eustace better, she might have been suspected of saying to herself, “How can this professed misanthrope reconcile such an assertion to his conscience!” As it was, she was probably thinking chiefly of her father’s amiable weakness for the society of his fellow-men.

“My remaining here, too,” went on Eustace, “depends on how I like it, or rather on how my father likes it. I do not suppose that he will like it at all. He has rather a droll reason for coming here. He usually affects Homburg, and only decided for Baden this year to avoid some people between whom and ourselves there is a kind of family feud.”

He spoke lightly, and his companion laughed as she said, “How romantic! Does it date back to the Middle Ages?”

“No; only to the days when he and the gentleman in question were young men together. They had a sort of most unfortunate double quarrel.” Here Eustace put up his eye-glass and stared hard at the bandsman he was nearest to, glancing for the tenth part of a second at the girl’s face before he dropped it again. But he could detect no change in her expression. If she were the daughter of the “Viper,” she clearly knew nothing of that two-fold sting.

“You have not experienced the romantic misfortune of that kind of feud?” he ventured to ask.

“I suppose it takes two to *keep up* a quarrel, as it does to make one,” Rachel answered in the same light tone, “and I am afraid our side would not be maintained with proper spirit. My father, as you probably noticed in the train to-day, is rather—impulsive; but I don’t think he could cherish a grudge against any one, whatever the provocation or injury.”

Eustace meditated for a few moments. Then he changed the conversation abruptly.

A little later Margery stopped, and announced that she was cold and tired, and so the spell had to be broken and the pleasant evening stroll cut short; and Eustace, for the second time that day, took leave on the steps of the Holländischerhof of

the strangers, a chance meeting with whom in the morning had—it was unaccountable, but it was true—transformed his life.

The girls' father lingered a moment to ask him whether he would drive with them to the Alte Schloss next day. He was too anxious to secure an agreeable companion to reflect that by this time the Alte Schloss had probably lost the charm of novelty for Eustace. In point of fact, Eustace had been there twice. The first time he had been impressed; the second time he had come back miserable, voting the whole thing hackneyed, a fraud, and a bore. When, however, he was invited to make the expedition for the third time, he spoke very warmly in praise of the view, and said that he should be only too delighted to do the honours of it.

“At two o'clock, then. Good night;” and the genial Celt, with a cordial shake of the hand, vanished in the direction of the smoking-room. Here he was presently so fortunate as to fall in with an old college friend, another man, all whose relations, though not he himself, were well known to him, and a Belgian count, who had married a connection of his wife's. His happiness was complete. He sat with them well into the small hours, gossiping to his heart's content, and finally went to his room, persuaded

that Baden-Baden was the nicest watering-place in Germany.

Eustace, meanwhile, had paused a moment in the entrance, with the intention of hearing from the *portier* the information that official had not been allowed to impart two hours before. He even went and looked into the office, but the *portier* being momentarily absent, he decided that he could not wait, and that there would be plenty of time to ascertain the truth in the morning. Perhaps he was less anxious to ascertain it than he had been two hours, or even half an hour, ago.

IV.

THE next morning, between seven and eight o'clock, a pale gleam of watery sunshine, and the strains of music, wafted through his open window from the gardens opposite, roused Eustace from his slumbers. He was fond of going out early, though he was not undergoing any "cure." He dressed in haste, lest the band should finish playing before he reached the seat in front of the *Conversationshaus*, where he was wont to sit with his book and listen. He liked to have

music going on while he read. It acted as a pleasant stimulus to his brain.

Enveloped in an old ulster, with a soft wide-awake pulled well over his brows for shade, he sat him down, unconscious that he was an object of some interest to the orthodox frequenters of the Trinkhalle, mostly Germans, who were taking their orthodox walk up and down and scoffing at *diesen Engländer*. The literature which found easier access to his brain by means of Strauss and Waldteufel was this morning contained in a Sanscrit journal, the *Pandit*, published at Delhi, which Eustace read regularly. He soon became so absorbed that he did not notice that the music had ceased, the kiosk emptied, and the water-drinkers thinned down to a mere sprinkling. When he did look up, there were but a very few still pacing to and fro, or scattered about on the benches.

On a line with Eustace, not more than a dozen yards off, there sat a young lady, also reading. Her umbrella, which she had put up to shade her book, concealed her face, but there was something in her figure that was familiar. Eustace started and half rose from his seat, then sat down again and waited. But he did not continue reading the *Pandit*; he only played with its pages, as he watched the outline of the

girlish figure near him, noting the same dress that Rachel had worn the day before, and the strong country boots, which he had also observed with the keenness of eye those who know what they portend have for such matters, as well as a *châtelaine* of antique silver ornaments and implements, by which alone it would have been easy to identify his fellow-traveller of yesterday. The book upon her knee was a slender one, in a paper cover. "A novel, no doubt," thought Eustace, "but I imagine of the better sort. I don't think she would read trash."

Yet the book did not look like a Tauchnitz. It had a dark grey cover, and it was too thin. Why this young man should have jumped to the conclusion that it was a work of fiction, it is difficult to say. Perhaps his notion of women's taste in literature was too much based on that of the young lady before spoken of, whom he had once fancied himself in love with. He had commenced his courtship by lending her books. His motto from very early manhood had been,

"Where the heart lies, let the brain lie also,"

and he had wished to justify his tenderness for her by the discovery of ideas and tastes in common. She returned his Tyndalls and J. S. Mills, his Ruskins and Brownings, unread, manifesting

a marked predilection for the more frivolous kinds of fiction. Strange to say, he found that he did not care for her less or feel less unworthy to tell her that he cared for her; but, while he hesitated, a bolder man carried off the prize. Now, after several years, he felt as keenly as ever, with all the visionary fervour which is supposed only to belong to one's teens, with all the boyish beautiful enthusiasm which coarser souls lose so quickly in the world's hurly-burly and in the din of sordid voices—the need of loving and of being loved. And he still dreamed of sympathy and mutual comprehension, of a walking together in the higher paths, a striving together for truth, a following together after righteousness.

In this girl whom he had heard called Rachel, and in whose company he had been but for a day, he felt that a man might find such a helpmeet. He saw in her a simpleness, a sweetness, a truthfulness, that passed anything he had known before, even in that old love of his; and if like the old love, like almost all the ladies he had known in India, she did not care to go very much below the surface of things, preferred chocolate soufflet and strawberry cream to solid food, and read only novels of the lighter sort, still his heart, at least, he believed that she would understand. The rest might follow; he

could train her, educate her—though she read only novels. In everything that was noble and good she would assuredly confirm and strengthen him, and it might be that with such culture as her intellect had not yet received——

But his self-communing was very vain and futile, for, however all this might be, he knew that it was too late—that he loved her.

Presently, as he sat watching her, she moved her umbrella a little, and began looking about her. Their eyes met, and she coloured slightly as she bowed to him. Then he got up, and ventured to wish her “Good morning,” and to hope that she and her sister had recovered the fatigues of yesterday. He intended to pass on almost instantly, lest his presence should annoy or embarrass her in any manner. He liked her for coming out alone in that simple unconventional way. He saw she had come out just as she would have gone out early into the garden at home, taking her book into the shade on the lawn, where thrushes and blackbirds would be her orchestra, and there would be no one to see her but the flowers. With the woman-like delicacy of feeling which characterized this gentle scholar, he felt that her privacy should be respected here as there, and that her maiden meditation should be undisturbed,

except by the passing salutation that courtesy demanded.

But she seemed so pleased to meet him, and began talking to him so frankly; she took the *rencontre* so naturally, and appeared so far from supposing that there was anything about it that could embarrass either of them, that Eustace, before he knew what he was doing, found himself seated on the bench beside her, chatting as sociably and unconstrainedly as he had ever done in his life.

Rachel told him that she was the early riser of the family; that she was always up a couple of hours before breakfast; and that as, when at home, she had a good deal of housekeeping, entertaining, and so forth, to do after breakfast, she was very glad of the quiet time to herself. Yes; she quite agreed with Eustace. She liked music, or any sound that was not actual noise, while she was reading. At home she liked the early twitter of the birds; and though the mowing-machine was a more prosaic implement than the scythe, still the whirr of it on the lawn, early, when the dew was thick and the fresh-cut grass scented the air, was nearly as good as this beautiful band to her.

"I confess," said Eustace, "that there is one thing I cannot do well when there is any descrip-

tion of sound whatever to be heard, and that is, write. The least thing distracts me when I am writing; and it is in vain that I call to mind such heroic examples as that, for instance, of Jane Austin, plodding away at her novels in a corner of the family 'keeping-room.' "

"Did she do that?" asked Rachel, with interest.

"So they say; but it is difficult to believe it, is it not? Can you imagine writing your letters, notes of invitation, and so forth, in the midst of such a Babel of sound: one sister playing on the "instrument," as they called it in those days; another reading a charade of her own composition for her brother to guess; a third, perhaps, relating the last piece of village gossip?"

"I think I am a pretty good hand at that; I have so much practice," Rachel said. She did not add that, however it might be with letters, she needed to be alone and in absolute quiet for writing proper; for composing poems, or certain short but very graceful and thoughtful essays, chiefly on literary subjects, which she was just now contributing to a magazine.

"Your correspondence is large?"

"We have a very large family circle, and, as

I was saying, always a good many going and coming."

"And so the notes have to be written more or less in public."

The subject of writing lasted for some time longer without a hint being dropped that this young lady ever put pen to paper for other than epistolary purposes. Then a glance at the pamphlet or magazine, or whatever it was upon her knee, again suggested her reading to Eustace.

"You say that you were out before seven. You must have got on nicely with your book."

"Except that I am a very, very slow reader."

"Ah, you like to linger over the heroine's delicious pain and trials long drawn out, which you know the third volume will set right, so that there need be no hurry and no drawback to the enjoyment."

This was the kind of thing Eustace had been wont to say to the old love, after he discovered that she only pretended to read Max Müller and Matthew Arnold.

Rachel smiled. As it happened, the book in her hand was a *brochure* by a German Jew, setting forth with equal discernment, truth, and grace, a Reform movement, to most Jews a stumbling-block, which took its rise near upon twenty centuries ago in Galilee. It had caught Rachel's

eye on a railway bookstall, and since German theology in German did not appal her, she had bought it, and found it a very beautiful little book. But she told Eustace nothing at all about her Jew. She merely said that it was not always the afflictions of the heroine that she liked to linger over, but that the thoughts of the writer would often start her off on a train of thought of her own, and that she would wake up and find an hour gone, and perhaps only three or four pages read.

"Do you know what that is?" she added.

"Indeed I do, well," said Eustace. "I often blush to think, when reading-time is up, and one has to plunge into the hurly-burly again, how little attention I have really bestowed on my author."

As he spoke, Eustace thought of a phrase of George Eliot's, which he had many a time applied to himself, "There was a meditateness behind his most observant attention." But the remark was, of course, far too subtle to be quoted to a young lady who read only fiction. George Eliot, in her later works especially, was a man's writer, a philosopher rather than a romancist. So he continued to talk down to her.

"A fine description of scenery, for instance, will remind you of some pleasant holiday tour,

when perhaps some friend who is dead or—or—married, was with you, and which you cannot recall without mentally going all through the whole history of that friend, and all the circumstances of your friendship.”

Of course such trains of thought as his companion had alluded to must be strictly personal. Women’s trains of thoughts always were. The first love, so Eustace had observed, had never generalized. For her the abstract did not exist.

“Yes,” said Rachel, who took all this condescension quite naturally, only anxious not to reveal that her fancy ever ranged beyond the concrete; “or you find your own experience so exactly described that you pause in wonder and astonishment——”

“At the prophetic insight which sounds the hidden depths of our nature, revealing even the secrets of our own hearts to ourselves,” said Eustace, grandly. “It is difficult for the moment not to believe not merely that you *know* the heroine, but that you *are* the heroine” (again that heroine! Eustace could not keep her out of the memorial); “that her joys and sorrows, her mental conflicts and ecstasies, are your own.”

“Do you feel that with regard to the hero?”

asked Rachel, rather slyly. But the blind old Indian replied quite unconsciously—

“Certainly I do. And I have noticed one odd thing, that the more heroic, the more self-denying and noble and gifted the hero is described as being, the more like him do I imagine myself to be!”

For a moment Rachel did not answer the jesting speech. But she looked keenly at her companion, and in her own mind she dared to determine that the self-mockery of that speech betokened a rare and genuine humility.

“That,” she said, seriously enough, “is because what is noble has more attraction for you than what is base.”

In his turn, Eustace looked at her. As far as a fierce frown enabled him to see her face, he imagined that it was serious and calm, without a trace of embarrassment, without a trace of coquetry. Surely she did not know what she was saying. Surely she did not mean that for him, individually, for him, Eustace St. Quentin, she had discovered—already—already—that the right was supreme; that his heart was set upon the higher things, and all his desire was towards them. If this wonderful thing were true—why, it was heaven opening, that was all.

It was perfectly true. Rachel had more than the usual discernment of good women in such matters, and, besides this, she had the insight of the artist, who is a born student of character. To make a flattering speech to him was far from her thought; she merely intended to speak the simple truth, with perhaps a dim sense that even she might confirm, by recognizing, the goodness she perceived in him.

And it may be that if women knew the mighty power of such a word of recognition to one who they see is struggling single-handed against the forces of darkness for love of God and them, they would try to speak it oftener.

But Eustace felt that he dared not give utterance to a thousandth part of the grateful and joyous emotion that her words had awakened in him. The very fact that it was so deep and absorbing made it impossible to even hint at it. His most common-place expression of gratitude, however cautiously framed, must needs be strong enough to frighten her. He preferred to assume that she had spoken generally.

“You really think that we identify ourselves with the best characters in books because goodness appeals to us most, not because we view ourselves through rose-coloured spectacles?”

"I think that is true of some of us," Rachel answered.

"I am very glad you think so," he said, earnestly. "So many people take the more cynical view. Probably you have heard of La Rochefoucauld?"

This was hazardous. The "Maxims" were not usually included in the list of girls' French school-books.

Rachel made a movement with her head, which might have meant either that she had heard of La Rochefoucauld, or that she was willing to receive him as a classic on Eustace's sole authority.

"I am pretty familiar with him," went on Eustace, "as his Maxims happen to be one of my father's two favourite text-books." He did not add that the other was "Lord Chesterfield's Letters to his Son." "Now it is a strange thing that even La Rochefoucauld, cynic as he was, has a saying which makes for your view. He says that it is with some of the virtues as it is with the bodily senses. Those who are entirely deprived of them can neither perceive nor comprehend them. So that we may be allowed to hope that the keen personal sympathy we feel with the heroes of romance—the *real* heroes—is based upon a certain affinity with them in ourselves."

"I am glad," Rachel said simply, "that you do not like cynics."

"I have seen too much practical cynicism in my life, especially my early life, for that," he answered sadly. "But do you know that I am considered one myself by some people? In certain circles in India I passed for a confirmed misanthrope."

"There are cynics and cynics," said Rachel, blushing a good deal at the sententious sound of her own remark. "There are the people whom the sorrows of others have made bitter, and there are the people who are embittered by their own disappointments. If I had seen as much of the world as you have; and seen how the strong prey on the weak; and how custom, however evil, is exalted over change, however necessary; and how religion is made a substitute for goodness, if not an actual cloak for wickedness; and how it is might, not right, that conquers;—I think I should be a cynic too. As it is, I have only read about these things."

"You have learned more from reading of them than most people learn from living amongst them," said Eustace, eagerly. "You don't know what it is to me to—to hear you speak. I have seldom met any one—never any woman—who understood the *sæva indignatio*, the

righteous anger and the just bitterness some of these things inspire."

"I saw that I should not startle you," the girl rejoined, smiling. Then, after a pause, which Eustace did not break lest he should lose any word of hers, she added: "I think I must go in now. We breakfast at nine."

He did not offer to accompany her to the Hotel. He fancied she might prefer to leave the gardens alone. He rose and bowed. She gave him her hand.

"We shall meet this afternoon?"

Eustace was dumb. He could not tell her what the prospect of another meeting was to him, still less could he bring his tongue to frame a mere polite assent.

He bent a little lower over her hand, and turned towards Marx's bookshop, while she took the opposite way, through the bazaar, to the Sophien Strasse.

V.

THE rest of the forenoon passed without an attempt on Eustace's part to carry out the instructions contained in his father's letter. So far from applying again to the *portier* at the Hotel de Hollande, he did not even glance at

the visitors' list which was issued that day, and lay on the table of the *salon* at the Englischerhof all the time he was writing his letters and reading the English papers. He actually averted his eyes from it. Yesterday's dread of ascertaining that that V. stood for Vibert had become a sort of terror to-day. The thought of separation was now unendurable, yet such a discovery could mean nothing else. Eustace had saved little or nothing in India. Knowing that eventually his patrimony would be larger than usually falls to the lot of a younger son, he had spent the greater part of his income (his personal expenditure went for very little) on public objects in which he was interested. Then came the break-down of his health, and he found himself once more dependent on his father, and likely to remain so for a considerable time, at any rate. If to defy him meant only being sent to Coventry, that could be borne; but Eustace knew that it meant to be disinherited, to be allowed not a shilling now, and to be cut off with a shilling hereafter. How, then, could he ask this girl to marry him? What could he offer her? He had thought a little of turning his hand to literature; but he knew what trying to live by literature meant. For that, as for other trades, the time seemed to

be gone by. Even if his health remained good in England, what openings were there in any occupation for a man of his age? It seemed of little use to attempt to repair the ruin. Everything at home was overcrowded. It was not courage that lacked. Apart from the consciousness that he was not justified in reckoning upon health, Eustace had known cases of men past thirty who, in circumstances similar to his own, had been thankful to take clerkships or secretaryships of two or three hundred a year, which they would have sniffed at in their teens. And, as he reflected bitterly, a man could not ask a woman to starve with him upon one of these, even were he so favoured by fortune as to secure one in the teeth of some hundreds of younger and better qualified aspirants.

Reflections like these occupied Eustace during the greater part of the morning; and very often he laid down his pen or his newspaper to pass his hand wearily across his brow, or to lean his head upon it and meditate upon his spoiled career and broken life. Even if the foreboding, which had grown in his mind almost to a certainty, were not to be realized, things seemed scarcely bettered. He felt such a poor, shattered object compared with that fresh, bright young creature. She was full of energy

and strength and life. He was so disappointed and so sad, and still too weak in body for much exertion, or for reasonable hope of an active, profitable future. She was so beautiful in her frank simplicity, which Eustace had learned that morning sprang not from want of thought, but from thinking truly, and from that higher innocence which has faced and vanquished the spectres of the mind. He felt so weary, so almost contaminated by the practical contact with evils which she knew only from books. The *Weltschmerz*, which one is supposed to rub off at five and twenty, was, at this juncture, when his own powers of usefulness and hopes of bettering the world were crippled, so vivid as to have in it something of the sting of shame.

It was in a mood of deeper depression than any he had known as yet, that Eustace set forth to keep his appointment for two o'clock at the Holländischerhof. He was not expecting his father till late in the day, and his surprise was great, on leaving his Hotel, to see him emerge from a station-cab piled with luggage, which had that moment drawn up at the door. There is no use in concealing the fact, that at the spectacle of Mr. Chester St. Quentin leisurely descending from the vehicle, leaning on the

arm of his valet, Eustace's heart sank several degrees lower than before. For a moment he stood perfectly still, watching the arrival like any other loafer about a Hotel doorway. He was amazed at the slightness of the change ten years had wrought in his father. Of course his hair was dyed, but it seemed nearly as abundant as of yore; and his figure was quite as erect, his face as unwrinkled. There was a studied carefulness about his travelling garb that betokened more than the remains of the dandy of thirty years since; and his whiskers were as scientifically trimmed, his moustache as affectionately waxed, as when he was courting the heiress that Austin Vibert married. He threw a quick glance as he stepped on to the pavement in the direction of his son; and Eustace noted, with a sort of painful amusement, that he was unrecognized.

Not but that there was every excuse for Chester St. Quentin. The careless and, it must be owned, somewhat shabby dress that hung on to rather than clothed the long, lean, stooping figure in the doorway was enough in itself to discourage suggestions of kinship. Moreover illness had altered and attenuated Eustace's features; and his moustache had grown since he had been in India.

Mr. St. Quentin was brushing past him into the entrance-hall, when Eustace suddenly held out his hand.

“Father!”

“Eustace! Why — what the deuce — that scarecrow was *you*!”

The greeting between father and son was not of the most demonstrative. The elder man was irritable with fatigue and disgust at the figure presented by his son; as for the younger, the springs of natural affection had early been frozen in him. Often while he was at Eton and in London “cramming,” he had excused himself when his friends asked him to meet their friends. He could not bear to see them with their fathers.

He was very much relieved to find, after a few minutes’ chat with his father in the comfortable room he had secured for him, that he desired to be left alone for the remainder of the afternoon. He had not slept the night before, and should try to get a nap.

“And how do *you* propose to kill the time till dinner?” he inquired, with a certain formal politeness and a rather curious glance at his “changeling” son. “This seems a deadly-lively sort of place; very inferior to Homburg, I should say. Prudish nonsense abolishing the tables.”

"I was intending to go with some people to the Alte Schloss."

"Who are they?"

"I don't know their names. I travelled with them from Heidelberg yesterday; in fact, spent the day with them."

"My dear fellow," said Mr. St. Quentin, starting up from the couch upon which he had thrown himself, "allow me to suggest to you that intimacies of that kind with chance acquaintances are very undesirable. I don't know what your Indian fashions may be. I fancy you go in for the sociabilities and so forth, but it won't do here. As sure as you get involved with people you know nothing about on the continent, they crop up at home, in the park, or at some race or place where you least wish to meet them. You can cut them, of course, if you like; but that is dangerous, as you can never tell but what it may be in their power to do you a bad turn. Now, this man—have you any idea what he is?"

"Not the slightest," said Eustace, rather wickedly, as he had a very shrewd guess that his friend was, at any rate, a small landed proprietor in West Norfolk.

"Exactly. Well, I will lay you six to one that he is either a publican or a pawnbroker.

He probably has prepossessing manners and a gentleman-like appearance. So much the worse. That is the kind of man who dislikes being dropped, and is very likely to injure you. You should be very careful not to give even a pawn-broker an opportunity of speaking ill of you. It is a mistake many people commit, but they live to rue it. I suppose your friend has a pretty wife or daughter?"

"Granting the pretty wife and daughter" — began Eustace, as good-humouredly as he could, but there was a dangerous flush on his bronzed forehead.

Again his father looked sharply at him.

"Ah!" he said meditatively. Then, throwing himself back on the sofa, "You may take my word for it, the game is not worth the candle," he added. Then he yawned extensively, and Eustace took the hint and retired.

By dint of running all the way, he arrived at the Hollande only a minute or two after his appointment. The sky had again overclouded to an alarming extent, but it was agreed that they should persevere. The landau could be closed in case of need, and it might hold up till they had seen the view, at any rate.

These people were very ardent, enthusiastic sightseers. They had evidently not been abroad

often enough to become *blasés*; yet it seemed to Eustace that, however that might be, they were among the people who do not easily weary of things or cease to find enjoyment in the same pleasures.

Margery especially was resolved not to be disappointed of the afternoon's expedition. Her head was turned by the intoxicating pleasure to a young girl of staying for the first time in her life in a beautiful foreign town, and she was by this time sufficiently at home with her caretaker of yesterday to manifest her delight unreservedly. She laughed and chattered all the way up to the old castle, and seemed in nowise depressed by the heaviness of the atmosphere and the absence of sunshine. It was quite dark in the pine plantations, and there were occasional thunder-growls overhead, but all was bright for little Margery; and Eustace, too, did not feel greatly concerned about weather, for he knew that when it came to shutting the carriage he should still be opposite to the face in which his own destiny was written, and which since yesterday had eclipsed all else for him.

It was not till they had climbed to the top of the tower to the eerie music of the *Æolian* harp; which gives fitting voice to the forlornness of the grand old ruin, and gazed for some time

on the magnificent expanse of the Rhine valley from Speyer to beyond Strasburg, with the chain of the Vosges in the distance and the pine forests and oak and beech woods and picturesque villas of Baden in the foreground, that big drops began to fall and a storm became imminent. The little party hurried back to their carriage amid lightning, thunder, and rain, just in time to escape a wetting, and drove home in a continuous deluge, which lasted till they reached the Sophien Strasse.

When the friendly altercation about payment, which is the ordinary sequel to a joint expedition, had been adjusted, Eustace lingered yet a moment to ask his new friends whether they had heard that there was to be dancing that evening at the *Conversationshaus*.

"Of course," he said, "in any case, the band would be indoors to-night. But it is very amusing to watch the dancing. I was there last Saturday."

"That would be fun," said Margery; "you will take us, won't you, father?"

Her father, for the moment, did not reply. He was engaged in searching for something in his pocket-book. As Margery turned to him, Eustace turned to Rachel, and said in those low tones of entreaty that are the sweetest

music in all the earth to a woman, "You will be there to-night?"

"I should like to come," she answered gently, looking straight into his eyes, that he might know she understood, and that, if she came, she, too, would find another happiness there besides the music and the dancing.

The scientists tell us that evolution has developed coyness and caprice in women by a natural process. But there was a poet once who conceived, in spite of evolution, the character of one Miranda.

"Hence bashful cunning,
And prompt me plain and holy innocence,"

he makes her say to the reverent wooer who has asked her name of her, chiefly that he may set it in his prayers.

The father of this beautiful Miranda who had just shown Eustace the interest that she took in him so plainly that he felt dazed and for the moment incapable of speech, now came up to the two and handed Eustace a card.

"It is an amusing circumstance," he said, "that I do not think we know each other's names. But I fancy we are better friends than many people who do. I hope our acquaintance may not share the fate of the ordinary chance meetings of foreign travel, but that we may

have an opportunity of improving it at home. Here is my card."

Before Eustace read the name—and it must be remembered that in order to do so he would have had to hold the card close to his eyes—he hastened to get out one of his own and give it in exchange.

"St. Quentin!" exclaimed the other. "I am charmed to fall in with one of the family. I was at college with your—uncle, is it, Lord St. Quentin? His name was Eustace. You are like him. Dear me, to think of your being a St. Quentin!"

Margery had drawn her sister aside, and was whispering and laughing with her.

"The third time father has exchanged cards with people since we started," she said roguishly.

"Hush!" said Rachel; "they will hear."

But Eustace heard nothing. He was so relieved at the matter-of-course way in which the communication of his name had been received, that for the moment he could think of nothing else. It had called up nothing but pleasant college reminiscences, that was clear. The city, and lawsuits, and heiresses, and horse-whippings were evidently not associated with it.

"*Au revoir*, this evening!" he said at last, pulling himself together, and addressing the trio with a bright cordiality that had something of "old sake's sake" in it. True, he had been taken solely on his own merits before, and the fact had given a peculiar charm and piquancy to this new friendship; but for all that, it was plain that the discovery of his being a St. Quentin had told in his favour, and unless a lover happens to be a very self-satisfied person indeed, he catches eagerly at anything which gives promise of advancing his suit, however indirectly.

"Her father will like me better than ever now," mused Eustace, as he strolled back to the Angleterre. "He is the most gregarious person I ever saw; and the fact that he once foregathered with my uncle has made him, I can see, all the keener on foregathering with me. Then, when she has known me long enough for me to tell her that I love her, he will be on my side. He will say, 'I should like you to marry a St. Quentin.'"

Absorbed in reflections of this nature, it was some time before it occurred to Eustace to look at the card he still carried in his hand. When he did so, holding it close to his eyes, and all but annihilating a tiny girl in a white cap

and blue check pinafore, who toddled across his path at the moment, he read thereon only the words—Mr. Austin Vibert.

VI.

HAD the man been acting? Had he deliberately chosen to ignore the feud which was known to everybody, and to recall only what pleasant associations he may have had with the name of St. Quentin? Had he perchance known all along that Eustace belonged to the family, and resolved, for reasons of his own, to take this opportunity of patching up the old quarrel? But what right had he to count on reciprocity? And, then, what could be his reasons? He had been, as far as Eustace knew, the injured party, and could have no conceivable motive for wishing to regain his old partner's good graces. Apart from the painful scandal that had made the two men enemies, Chester St. Quentin was not the sort of man whose intimacy would be coveted, except by people who had some particular object to gain by it. One bitter thought did occur to Eustace in the first frenzy of the terrible discovery. Could

this man be the mere vulgar, unprincipled adventurer that his father had always chosen to represent Austin Vibert as being? Had he come abroad husband-hunting for his daughters, set a deliberate trap for him, Eustace, and having somehow found out who he was, stooped so far as to feign oblivion of or indifference to the family quarrel, in the hope that Eustace, once "caught," would do the same? But such a thought in connection with the father of one who had shown herself beyond all possibility of doubt more high-minded, more frank and open and true than any woman he had known, was too hideous to be entertained for a moment. Eustace preferred to let the matter remain an enigma. One thing only in the miserable complication was clear to him, and that was that his short dream of happiness must end that night. For her sake—only for her sake—it must end.

Eustace climbed to his third storey, arranged his toilet, and came down to his father's door like a man reeling under a physical blow. What a merciful arrangement is it, that the faculty of thought-reading, like the faculty of thought itself, or the faculty of love, is confined only to the very few, and is in them, as yet, only tentative, embryonic, half-developed! We may

be inwardly revolving schemes which are to revolutionize art or science or society, and our most intelligent interlocutor will imagine that we are listening to his grievances about investments or editors or cooks; we may be nursing a secret joy which makes unceasing music in our ears, and people will fancy that we hear our own remarks on the weather, or last night's debate; we may be roasting on a slow fire of unsuspected anguish, while our most intimate friend congratulates us on being in "good form," and innocently echoes our laughter.

Mr. St. Quentin, who had decided "to see what sort of a dinner they gave you at *table d'hôte*," though he generally dined in private, talked about wines on his way downstairs arm-in-arm with his son, taking no count of his haggard looks and irrelevant answers. The truth was, he had no particular wish for a *tête-à-tête* with Eustace till the following day. His head ached still, and he disliked long talks when his head ached. It would be expected of him to do the paternal, tell all the family news, and ask a great deal about Eustace's affairs, and that kind of thing bored him. He should make him the offer of a handsome allowance next day, which would put everything right. He supposed the noodle would not be too proud

to accept it now, though he had not touched a penny of his while drawing pay in India.

"I see very few English," he remarked, as they took their seats at table. "This place is transmogrified since I was here last—nothing but German shopkeepers from Strasburg and Carlsruhe. The English all go to Homburg now. That man looks like an Englishman, at the end of the table, next to the woman with the gold necklace. Manchester or Birmingham. Those are Americans next to them. The rest all Germans, I think."

His rapid survey of his fellow-diners completed, Mr. Chester St. Quentin turned his attention to the dinner itself.

"Soup cold, of course, but not so bad as usual. It is strange how seldom you get good soup. The best soup I ever eat is at the house of some quite small people; £2000 a year at the outside. They have a woman who understands it, and they don't stint her."

The discovery upon the wine-list of a particular brand upon which he was dependent, raised his drooping spirits for the space of half an hour, and he talked volubly on general topics.

He informed his son that during his absence the country had been going to perdition at railway speed.

Eustace, in a mechanical parenthesis, surmised that democracy had made great strides in the last ten years.

"It is not so much radicalism that does the mischief," said Chester St. Quentin, "as this pernicious humanitarianism, which is bred outside the House, among a pack of women and fools, and is spreading fast inside it. Imperial questions are shelved that every sentimental ass may air his crotchets about South African niggers, or cruelty to animals, or women's rights. We are not even permitted to enjoy ourselves nowadays, but some Puritanical fad-monger will pull a long face and tell us we are trampling on somebody or something. I recollect you were rather inclined that way yourself at one time, but no doubt you have outgrown the follies of your youth."

"I must own to a sneaking sympathy with the crotchetmongers still," said Eustace, with a weary smile. His energies for the moment were concentrated on the task of appearing to eat his dinner without in reality doing so. But Mr. St. Quentin would have been none the wiser had he spared himself the effort. He had that curious mixture of penetrating shrewdness where he was interested, with complete obtuseness where he was not, which is a

frequent characteristic of the clever, selfish man.

“Well, I wish I could put you on to one or two charities that are the plague of my life,” he rejoined. “You would enjoy it, which I do not. But it looks well to be on one or two things of that sort. The constituents like it.”

“I am afraid your friends might consider me too *doctrinaire*,” said his son, with mock gravity, “and I am sure they would think me sentimental.”

These were two adjectives which had by this time acquired a very familiar sound for Eustace St. Quentin. But he was rather a stiff-necked person ; and he had not yet ceased to think for being dubbed *doctrinaire*, or to feel for being labelled sentimental.

The elder man, scenting some covert irony in the remark, turned the conversation to a measure of foreign policy, which was just then the theme of universal discussion. Eustace nodded, and threw in a monosyllable here and there. He was now debating in his own mind whether or no he should put off till the morning the unpleasant task of communicating his discovery to his father. He came to the conclusion that it would be as well to get it over

at once. He would merely wait till they were alone together.

Mr. St. Quentin did not propose to go out that evening, he told his son, as they adjourned to the smoking-room for a cigarette. It was damp after the rain, and besides there was nothing worth turning out for now.

"I am glad," said Eustace, "that you have come to that conclusion; for it is my painful duty to inform you, that had you gone out this evening, you might possibly have encountered the person you came to this place in order to avoid."

Chester St. Quentin started, stood still, and asked his son in terms more forcible than polite, why he had not told him so before.

"Till late this afternoon," Eustace resumed, in measured tones which exasperated his excited parent much more than he had any idea of, "I had no reason to suppose that Mr. Vibert was not at Homburg. But happening to be at the Hotel de Hollande this evening, I chanced to discover that he is staying there, and likely to remain for some time."

"Then Mrs. Lorraine was right after all, and Jack Chichester has sent me to this hole on a wild goose chase," said his father, with sundry embellishments suggested by his fury. "The

woman is not generally to be trusted. She has a tongue as long as your arm; and when she told me the Viper was sure to be here after young Bressey, who is doing the Black Forest with a reading party, and whom they have an eye to for one of the Miss Vipers, I shouldn't have believed her if I hadn't heard the same thing more than once at the club. However, Jack Chichester contradicted it flatly, on what I took to be unimpeachable authority, and I can't understand now how he can have been mistaken. Stop a bit! Can the scoundrel have done it on purpose? No. He would have liked to, but he knows I could get him turned out of his secretaryship if he had."

"I presume you will be leaving this place to-morrow?" inquired Eustace.

"Certainly. I should suggest our telegraphing at once to the Victoria at Homburg for rooms, and if they can't promise them for to-morrow, stopping at Frankfort till they can. Weigand will oblige me if he can, I know. Upon my word, I am not half sorry Vibert has turned up here. I should never have come to this dead-alive place but for him. The climate appears to me exceedingly unpleasant, and all my friends are at Homburg. By the way, the Goddards are there this year."

“Who are the Goddards?” asked Eustace.

The two men had the smoking-room to themselves, and Mr. St. Quentin had by this time so far regained his equanimity as to have lighted a cigarette, and thrown himself into an easy chair. He started and turned round at Eustace’s question.

“Not heard of the Goddards? Ah, well, you have been out of the swim for some time. By the way, don’t you see any of the society papers in India? It is a good plan to read them when one is out of it at all. They give you a good general idea of what is going on, though they do tell lies.”

If Eustace had been frank, he would have owned that to be thoroughly posted in what was “going on,” in his father’s sense, at home had not formed part of the programme he had proposed to himself in India. But one is not entirely frank with an out-and-out man of the world, any more than one is entirely frank with a child. In both cases it is permissible, and indeed essential, to shape our remarks with some reference to our hearer’s faculty of apprehension.

“I did not often come across them,” said Eustace. “If Ethel, or anybody at home, had had the benevolence to pass one on now and then——”

"I suppose she knew you wouldn't read them. The Goddards," said Mr. St. Quentin, taking his cigarette between his finger-tips, and speaking with a measured solemnity befitting the subject—"the Goddards are two young ladies worth £15,000 a year apiece, daughters of Goddard, the contractor, you know, who died the other day. They are nice girls, too, and not bad looking. They have refused several good matches already"—here he enumerated various disappointed *soupirants*—"though they are quite young; only came out last year."

"You must regret that Chester is no longer eligible," observed Eustace.

"It is a pity he did not wait a year or two," replied the other gravely. "However, he did pretty well for himself. Blanche will have £50,000 from her godfather alone, and the family diamonds, which are to be hers if her brother doesn't marry (and he won't), are a goodish fortune in themselves. I don't see," he added, after a short space, looking at the ceiling, and emitting two or three meditative puffs—"I don't see what is to prevent *your* having a bid for one of the Goddards."

"Nothing whatever, except that I do not happen to hold marriage an auction and women chattels," Eustace almost longed to answer in

the angry disgust provoked by the nauseating theme. But he smothered the unreasoning impulse, and merely said, with the misleading calm of suppressed feeling, "Do you think I should stand any chance?"

His father, betrayed into believing him serious, sat upright in his chair and spoke with renewed earnestness.

"That would depend upon yourself. From what I hear of them, I should think they were the sort of girls with whom one man stands as good a chance as another if he plays his cards well. They clearly have their whims. They say one of them, the elder of the two, I think, has announced her determination to marry for love. The other paints, and is wild about art."

"I should think girls with whims of that sort would be not unlikely to throw themselves away," commented Eustace, in the same vein of covert sarcasm.

"Precisely," his father resumed, still taking him seriously. "If they don't, they must be uncommonly well managed; and they say Mrs. Goddard, the aunt, understands nothing about it. If she had, they would have married well before now."

"What a pity!"

"No woman," quoth Chester St. Quentin

oracularly, "can be expected to marry girls, unless she has been used to society all her life. Chaperons are born, not made. It is a business eminently requiring the *esprit de société*, which you never find in *parvenus*. I believe there will be no obstacles from that quarter. And, then, at these watering-places the facilities are very much greater than in London. You meet for an hour or two before breakfast, and can generally secure a *tête-à-tête* without difficulty. You lunch at the same *conditorei*. At Homburg you play tennis together the whole afternoon. Then in the evening there is dancing or fireworks at the Curhaus—endless opportunities in fact. You are together the whole day."

"Talking of dancing," said Eustace, "there is dancing here to-night, and I promised my friends this afternoon to go and look on."

"Ah, the man with the pretty daughter! Well, good night. I shall go to bed. We must have a little chat about business to-morrow."

Eustace had got to the door, when his father called him back.

"By the way," he said with emphasis, "take my advice, and don't play the fool with this girl, whoever she is. I am disposed to think that if you make up your mind to it, and if I take care to let it be known, as I intend to do, that I

am prepared to make you a handsome allowance, you will get one of the Goddards."

"And I am to break no hearts in the meanwhile?"

Chester St. Quentin looked keenly at his son. At last he suspected that he was being laughed at. If not, this mature and learned changeling of his must be the veriest simpleton for all his thirty years.

"I was not precisely thinking of hearts," he rejoined, with a certain contemptuous irritability of tone. "What I wished to convey to your mind was, that any entanglements of the kind are undesirable when you mean marriage with any particular individual. How do you know that this girl may not turn up at Homburg, for instance, and spoil everything? You may trust her to do it somehow, if she thinks herself ill-used. You had better take care not to mention you are going there."

"I shall certainly avoid doing so," said Eustace, with a strange smile, as he recollected what manner of young lady it was against whose revengeful machinations he was being warned, and whose name she bore.

But his heart was sick within him, as he left the presence which had been nothing but pain and horror to him since he began to think at all,

and into which nothing but dire necessity would have forced him back. He resolved that he would accept only enough to keep body and soul together from his father, and that for not a moment longer than he could help. Something he could surely do to earn a pittance, and that was all that he should ever need now. For the rest it mattered little what happened to him, one way or the other.

He peered about for some time among the crowd in the great ball-room before he could find the little party he was in search of. Presently Margery passed him, dancing with her father's Belgian friend, her eyes dancing too with irrepressible joy, and looking, in her white frock, like a snowdrop in a garden of anemones. She gave him a friendly nod as she passed. There were a great many lookers-on—Germans, with a sprinkling of Americans and Europeans. At last, from among the rows of seated spectators the eyes that he loved met his, and it seemed to him, as he dropped his glass and made his way towards Rachel, that there had been a look in them as of waiting and of expectation. Her father was not with her. She told him that he was lazy, had preferred a chat with his friends at the Hotel, and as Mrs. Howard—might she introduce him to Mrs.

Howard?—was going, she and Margery had come with her.

“The wife of the old college friend, no doubt,” thought Eustace, as he bowed to a pleasant-looking woman in black, beside whom Rachel was sitting. The three chatted for a few minutes, watching the dancers and quizzing the odd figures, some few of whom are always to be seen in motley assemblages of the kind; and Eustace’s remarks were as mirthful as those of the ladies, though all the time he was saying to himself, “How can I speak to her alone to wish her good-bye—good-bye?”

He was an indifferent dancer, and characteristically he could not make up his mind to ask her to entrust herself to him. He would have given Margery a turn with all the pleasure in life; but Rachel! It seemed to him that not even the man who would one day have the sacred happiness of calling her betrothed should ask Rachel to dance. Reverence was a faculty so ingrained in him, so deeply rooted in the inmost fibres of his being, that very often it overreached itself. With him love was scarcely love, but worship; and worship, aspires greatly, but dares little.

By-and-by he was driven to speak.

Margery came back to her chaperon, her eyes

dancing still, on the arm of her Belgian cousin ; and as they approached, Eustace detected unmistakably in the count's look his intention to ask her sister for the next dance. Or he thought he did. Instantly he took the plunge.

"I am a very poor dancer, but will you—would you very much mind giving me one trial ?"

"With pleasure," she said ; and Eustace, with a swift pang, fancied that she seemed glad. The next moment she was refusing the Belgian.

When the music began they had their turn before the room became crowded, and they got on very well, but at the end of a minute or two Eustace was obliged to stop. He had eaten very little that day, and in his exhausted state, the gas and the heat, together with the tumult of feeling within him, made him faint and dizzy. Rachel saw that something was wrong.

"I am afraid you are not well," she said in a tone so far removed from the ordinary one of conventional sympathy as to sound to him almost tender. "I am afraid you are not quite strong enough for dancing yet. Come out into the air. It will revive you."

She almost drew him out into the garden. It was damp, but not actually raining, and the

night breezes quickly restored him to himself as they walked up and down. She did not let go his arm. She seemed to take him in charge, made a little movement when it was best to turn, regulated the pace, said little, but appeared to be on the watch.

For some time after he was right again he kept silence. He did not know how to begin telling her that that was their last meeting, that they two, who had, as it were, come together from the ends of the world, and with such a curious suddenness become—friends—yes, she would admit that they were friends—that they two had, after all, met only like ships at sea, to part as abruptly, and for ever.

Presently, judging him better, but probably more disposed to be talked to than to talk, she began discoursing of any pleasant trifles that suggested themselves. The next day was Sunday, and had he heard that there was to be a balloon ascent by a female aëronaut from the Gardens? She had never seen a balloon except as a speck in the sky, and was greatly looking forward to the sight. She hoped it would be fine; but they were much disappointed by the climate of Baden, and were it not for the reports of bad weather from all parts of the continent she should be inclined to give up

the Black Forest scheme, and try some other part. Her father was very happy, and delighted to have found so many friends; but he had not been quite the thing when they left home, and if this sort of weather continued, he certainly would not derive so much benefit from the tour as they had hoped.

Her companion still continuing mute, she tried a theme which she fancied might have more interest for him.

"I have been thinking over our talk this morning," she said; then, for one moment, she paused.

"So have I," said Eustace, eagerly. He did not add, "I have thought of nothing else." "And—presently—I have something to say to you about it."

"Please say it now."

"Will you not let me hear your thoughts first?"

"Oh," she said, laughing, "I am sure they are not so well worth hearing. I was only thinking that perhaps you could understand some other odd ways of mine that I thought, till this morning, must be peculiar to myself. You said that you reflected an hour for every half-hour that you read, just as I do. Now, do you mind having the same book on hand for

a very long while—for weeks, perhaps months, at a time? I do not; I like it. People say to me, ‘Still at So-and-so!’ and cannot understand. But I find that, however much I am enjoying a book, it is no hardship to me to put it down at any moment or to leave it altogether aside for a while. Take a good story coming out in parts, which so many people can’t bear. I can always take up the thread again; and very often I leave a novel unfinished for weeks, because the more I like it the less I care to hurry over it. Isn’t that strange?”

“I am just the same,” said Eustace. “I never had any sympathy with your quick reader, who gallops through a book at express speed, and sits up half the night to finish it, as if it would turn sour in the morning, like cream in hot weather. The personages in a good story ought to be thoroughly real to you; and in real life you don’t cram your friendships and acquaintances into a couple of hours. They are spread over a greater or less portion of your life, and the pleasanter they are the less you wish to condense them, the more you wish to return to them, to savour them, to muse over them, and cradle them in your thought.”

“You have expressed exactly what I mean,”

Rachel cried, warmly. "I felt sure you would sympathize. But other people think it very odd in us, don't they?" she added, laughing again with the soft gaiety that so pleasantly relieved her earnestness.

The unconscious bracketing of herself with him was not lost upon Eustace. But the struggle to say—not that which he longed to say—but that which his plain duty and his respect for her dictated, again left him tongue-tied. He muttered something about the dread of singularity being an infirmity of childhood, which one outgrew.

"And now," she said, "it is your turn. What was it that you had to say to me about our talk?"

"I had to beg your forgiveness for the blunderheaded stupidity which is an unfortunate characteristic of mine. I did not discover till just as we were parting that I was talking to one who—to a person of mental culture such as yours. I talked down to you, in the way I got into the habit of doing in India. And afterwards I saw what an impertinent coxcomb I had been. And this afternoon there were many things you said——"

He stopped again. How could he remind her of the things that she had said without

telling her that he should always treasure them in his heart?

"But I don't see that your conduct requires an apology," Rachel said, brightly, though there was a strain of seriousness in her tone. "It was only kindness that made you talk down to me, as you call it. You did not wish to bore one. If I were as conscientious as you, I should apologize to you for having misled you by a number of frivolous remarks when we first met. But I don't think I will, for my intentions were benevolent, too. *I* did not wish to bore *you*."

"It is very kind of you to put it in that way," said Eustace—"too kind."

"In fact," she went on gaily, "we were like some people I have just been reading about in a German novel, who afforded the entertaining spectacle of two persons hiding from each other behind the same tree! Well, now the murder is out. We know that we are both—shall I say Radicals? No; I think Reformers sounds better; both blue—no; a gentleman can't be blue—both pedants; both prigs! It is very terrible. What shall we do?"

"I think," said Eustace as lightly as he could, the forced gaiety of his tone contrasting strangely with the heart-heaviness within—"I

think one might get used to it in time. If we were staying on here, for example, I should ask you for some lessons in wearing the stupendous weight of learning which I suffer from lightly, like a flower; but, unluckily, we are leaving this place to-morrow."

"To-morrow!"

The abrupt announcement startled her into an exclamation of surprise.

"To-morrow, I am sorry to say. The fact is, my father—I told you he arrived at midday—is—is disinclined to remain here."

"I remember," said Rachel—her voice sounded a little altered and subdued—"you told me he came here to avoid an old enemy. The old enemy has not turned up here, has he?"

"Well—yes," Eustace answered, pausing in anxious bewilderment for what might come next. But nothing throwing any light on the deepening mystery followed.

"I am sorry," Rachel said, simply. "Where does he propose going?"

"In the first instance to Frankfort."

Rachel had been at Frankfort a few years before, she said, and she talked for a few minutes conventionally of the lions there, Dannaeker's Ariadne, the Judengasse, and Goethe's house. She waited for him to tell

her, without more asking on her part, where he should go after Frankfort, and how they were to meet again—for it was not possible but they were to meet again—in England.

But it was in vain she waited. He, too, talked on drearily of Frankfort, trying not to make serious blunders in that miserable empty clatter we are doomed to at such moments, when converse is impossible, and silence would reveal too much.

At length, as he said nothing, and as the void in her own heart made itself more keenly felt every moment, she spoke.

“I think Mrs. Howard will be looking out for me,” she said, not coldly, but with a touch of reserve he had not perceived in her before. “Shall we go in?”

He moved towards the entrance. He knew that the time had come.

“We make an early start to-morrow,” he said, with an effort. “I am afraid I must wish you good-bye this evening.”

“My father will be sorry not to see you.”

“Will you tell him how sorry I am not to have the opportunity of taking leave of him? I hoped to have seen him to-night.”

“Now, surely,” she thought, “he must say something about our seeing him again.”

Perhaps most girls, since he said never a word, would have themselves referred to possible future meetings. But Rachel's interest in her new friend was too deep for that. It had become matter of too serious moment to her that she should see him again. If he did not speak of it—did not care about it enough to speak of it—she had mistaken him very strangely, that was all. She felt vaguely in that moment, as they entered the gaslit ball-room, amid the din of music and voices, and he was still silent, that if this were so, she should suffer a good deal from it; certainly she should have less faith in human sympathies and friendships and those rare affinities which once or twice in a lifetime unite us in mystic, magical communion with a fellow-creature. Were such affinities so common that they could be taken as matters of course, enjoyed, and then forgotten, as you forget the many chance encounters of life that bring neither pleasure nor profit?

Downcast and vexed in spirit, the girl moved silently beside Eustace to the distant corner, where she espied a little group formed of Mr. and Mrs. Howard, Margery, and the Belgian count.

The next moment she was arrested by a strange whisper in her ear.

“Good-bye! good-bye! I am going. I must go. I can’t bear it.”

She looked at him in surprise, stopped, and let go his arm. The drawn, pallid look that had alarmed her before seemed to have returned suddenly.

“You are feeling ill again? Oh, I am so sorry! The rooms are hotter than ever.”

“Yes; the rooms are too hot,” he said, with a strange look at her. “Will you make my ‘good-byes’ to the rest?”

Then, with an uncontrollable impulse, he held out both hands to her.

“You don’t know what your kindness has been to a lonely, broken-down wretch! Show kindness when you can to a stranger—always. It seems a very little thing to you, I know. I can understand that. It is so natural to you. But to us—well, no man worthy of the name but will bless you for it to the last day of his life.”

He wrung her hands, and darted through the nearest door, and out into the night again.

VII.

Boys and girls, whose capacity for feeling and thought is a little greater than their neighbours', are apt to fancy themselves lonely, and to write verses on their forlornness, which is often real enough; but the true solitude comes some years later. The truer the thought, the deeper the feeling in a very young man, the less willingly he surrenders the beautiful beliefs common to all youth, the more generously he attributes them to the rest of the world—indeed imagines the world governed by them. He is warmed and fed by his own inward fire of love and hope, his own integrity and pureness of heart. But in the rare case when a man grows to be thirty, with all that is holiest in boyhood unblemished in him, yet with a dozen years' experience of life added, having much practical acquaintance with affairs and insight into the ways of men of different ranks and climes, and having never flinched from learning the painful lessons or facing the ugly facts which those who love truth above all things must learn and must face—in such a case solitude makes itself felt as a very grim reality. It is then that one is first really awake to the difference between

the inner world of aspiration and conviction and the outer one of haphazard and expediency, and begins to feel vividly that to be absolutely true to oneself—a thing which seemed so easy once—is infallibly to isolate oneself, and voluntarily to choose loneliness and unpopularity instead of flattery and favour. It is not that the world means unkindly, or consciously detests goodness and highmindedness as such, but simply that it is governed for the most part by second-hand opinions; that almost no one has the courage or the aptitude to think or feel for himself; and that any one who persistently does think for himself makes himself singular, and finds himself, of necessity, drifting apart from his fellows.

All this Eustace St. Quentin had got to realize with sufficient intensity during the latter portion of his Indian career. For two or three days here in Germany he had had a passing glimpse of something different, of a beautiful, helpful sympathy and comprehension and companionship such as he had dreamed of in youth, but abandoned all hope of finding long ago. That was at an end; and now, at Homburg, alone with his father, or mixing with him in a set he disliked and despised—chiefly elderly worldlings of Chester St. Quentin's stamp, politi-

cians and men of pleasure, with few ideas beyond amusement, self-interest, success, party, and the latest social scandal—he felt more than ever like an exiled wanderer from some other planet, doomed for his sins to consort with a people of strange language, whose occupations were contemptible to him, whose aims repulsive, and whose dialect incomprehensible. He made his health an excuse for being as much alone as he could, and the weather continuing most ungenial, he was allowed to take refuge in invalid ways, which at any rate secured him a certain amount of quiet. He submitted the day after their arrival to an introduction to the Miss Goddards, whom he found pleasant, unaffected girls, caring a great deal more for lawn-tennis than either for art or for love; but it turned out that each had become engaged the week before to a cousin, so that speculation on that head was at an end for the gossips of Homburg, and Eustace was spared the necessity of annoying his father by refusing to “bid” for one of them.

In the course of the same day, as Eustace was looking at the Hotel visitors’ book, he happened upon this entry under a recent date, “Mr. Austin Vibert and party,” and forthwith rushed to the *portier* to know what it meant.

“This gentleman, was he here the other day?”

“Yes; but he had only remained a night. He had been recalled suddenly—to England,” the *portier* thought.

“No; for I have just met him at Baden.”

The *portier* shrugged his shoulders. He had certainly said he was going home—“business, illness, what do I know? something unforeseen. But if you have seen him at Baden—— Your carriage for the Saalburg? certainly, madam; it is quite ready. Excuse me,” and, with a wave of the hand, the mercurial *portier* glided away to conduct a party of ladies to the door, leaving Eustace in a state of greater bewilderment than ever. His Baden friends had said nothing of having been at Homburg. Indeed, he had understood them to say they had come straight from Norfolk *viâ* Harwich and Antwerp, only lingering a day or two there and at Brussels to explore those places a little, and staying one night at Coblenz to break the journey thence to Baden-Baden. The whole thing was becoming more inscrutable at every turn. Of course it mattered very little that mystery was being heaped on mystery in this manner. The main fact remained clear—he should never see them again. But naturally he kept revolving the thing in his mind without intermission; and after dinner, as they

strolled over to the Curhaus together, he mentioned that entry in the visitors' book to his father.

Mr. St. Quentin opined that the Viper had probably had excellent reasons for announcing that he was quitting Germany. The whole procedure was in exact accordance with the serpent-like tortuousness of his character. Doubtless some man who owed him a thrashing had turned up at Homburg and scared him away. He was an arrant coward, like most low-born scoundrels.

His father's asperity would have struck Eustace as highly diverting, if he had been in the mood for viewing anything on its humorous side. Poor Austin Vibert! Was he really as black as he was painted? or was he, after all, only a rather vacillating, weak-minded, sociable, harmless person, who changed his plans every other day, and who did not mind employing a little innocent guile to heal an unpleasant wound which would never have gaped so long had he had his way.

"I suppose," said Eustace, in the ironical vein which had become habitual with him in addressing his father—"I suppose it can be proved that courage is entirely a matter *de pur sang*?"

"There will be very little courage anywhere

soon if we go on in the molly-coddling, goody-goody way we are in at present," said Mr. St. Quentin, pensively. "Take the duel now. What folly to abolish the duel! If it was nothing else, it was, at any rate, an education in pluck to a young fellow to know that he could give and take the satisfaction of a gentleman at any time. And now there are a parcel of milksops who want to do away with war! What is to become of the national stamina, I should like to know? But what can you expect? The country is no longer governed by gentlemen, and King Plebs very naturally prefers his counter to the field of glory."

"It's very true," Eustace rejoined, with mock gravity.

"'Wat did God make us raytional creeturs fer,
But glory an' gunpowder, plunder an' blood?'

A gentleman, of course, is used to blood from the cradle. He begins with stags and foxes and otters. Then, as a young lieutenant or a middy, he burns native villages, and shoots down objectors, then——"

"Why, there's Mrs. Lorraine! Mrs. Lorraine, who would have thought of seeing you here? I imagined you at Cowes, as usual. I am very glad the Fates have ordained otherwise."

Mr. St. Quentin joined himself with some alacrity to his friend Mrs. Gaston Lorraine's party. He soon wearied of his son's company. He presented Eustace to her and to her married daughter, who was with her, and they were presently joined by several gentlemen, and all took their seats on the terrace at the back of the Curhaus to wait for the fireworks.

For the gardens were *en fête* that evening, and thronged with people, Germans as well as English. At Homburg, generally speaking, one sees only English and Americans, the other nationalities being swamped in the Anglo-Saxon herd; but on Sundays and *fête*-days crowds flock in from Frankfort for the day, and great, one fancies, must be their disgust at the species of foreign occupation, which cheats them of elbow-room in a watering-place of their own. This foreign occupation amounts to being something ludicrous. You go down to the Elizabeth-Brunnen in the morning—only English thronging the spring, with here and there, perhaps, a grand duke or so; you enter a *conditorei* at lunch-time—it is crammed with English, so that there is not standing-room. At the lawn-tennis ground in the afternoon, even the spectators are English—perhaps one stray cavalry officer in light blue uniform may be seen looking on

through his *pince-nez*, much as an Oriental potentate looks on in a European ball-room. In the streets all day long you hear the Anglo-Saxon tongue, as it were Piccadilly or Bond Street set down bodily among the Taunus mountains. In the evening at the Curhaus, nine-tenths of the dancers will be English; or, if there is a concert, all the performers will be Londoners, and the programme such as you might hear in a Belgravian drawing-room.

This year there were perhaps extra reinforcements of English and Americans on account of the presence of English Royalty, whose incognito, duly respected, only added a certain piquancy to the diversion of watching and canvassing the doings of a well-known figure, who was dancing and dining, drinking the waters, and even—it was all over Homburg in half an hour—playing lawn-tennis, “just like anybody else.”

Of course the talk to-night among the little knot of people that had clustered round Mrs. Gaston Lorraine soon turned to the illustrious Incognito—how he had spent the afternoon, whether he had dined at the Curhaus or at a Hotel, who would be at his dance the next day, and so forth.

Eustace, whom this talk did not greatly

interest, sat listening, thankful for the darkness, as one always is in seasons of trouble. It makes one's silence less noticeable, and the spirit's gloom reflected in the face unobtrusive for the time being. He tried once or twice to say something pleasant to the younger lady, just married, as her mother had been before her, at seventeen, and looking already as much bored by her matrimonial bonds as her mother had long been renowned for being. But she answered him in monosyllables. He was dull, not in the swim, did not know her set, and consequently had nothing racy to say about any members of it. She could talk glibly enough with the other gentlemen, but, then, they had a very great number of friends in common, which makes the whole difference to conversationalists of a certain order.

Presently, among the scraps of tittle-tattle that reached him, he heard his father's voice in a stage-aside to his crony.

"Do you know that you were perfectly right, after all, about the Viper? He has gone on that hunting expedition to the Black Forest, after all."

"I knew it," the lady rejoined. "I was perfectly certain from what my cousin said he had an eye to Ernie Bressey. You know Ernie was down there at Christmas with young Vibert,

and she met him at their ball, and said she could see they would all give their eyes to bring it about. And no wonder! I suppose he'll be one of the richest men in England some day. She says the girl is very pretty, but very fast, and she isn't sure that she's quite to Ernie's taste (Ernie's mother is a sort of cousin of ours, you know); but I dare say between them they'll manage it somehow."

"Very pretty, but very fast!" Eustace shuddered. Could this description, however mangled by two or three unscrupulous tongues, have ever remotely applied to Rachel? Or was it intended for a truthful picture of her childish sister, the conscientious, excitable Margery, half-romp and half-prude?

"I shall have to call Master Jack to account for leading me by the nose," said Mr. St. Quentin. "The only thing to be said for him is, that it seems the Viper did come here for a day or so—I cannot imagine why. He seems to have been at the Victoria, too."

"Good gracious! And you are stopping on there? I should have thought you'd move off directly to some place that had not been polluted by his presence."

Mr. St. Quentin took the banter quite amicably from long-privileged lips

“Are there any lodgings to be had near you in the Untere Promenade?” he inquired sentimentally.

VIII.

IN this manner one long dreary week passed. The sameness of the daily programme began to pall terribly upon Eustace. At Homburg nobody goes anywhere or does anything except meet three or four times a day at the springs, the tennis-ground, the band. There is a town—Frankfort-on-the-Main—within easy reach by rail, teeming with interest—artistic, architectural, archæological. But no one goes there. There are the well-excavated remains of a magnificent Roman fortress within a short drive, and there is a museum well stocked with antiquities found within its walls; but scarcely any one visits either. In the grounds of the Schloss, at the west end of the town, there is a tower a hundred and eighty-eight feet high—the Weisse Thurm—from which a fine view of the surrounding country can be obtained. But if any enterprising Briton chance to give himself the trouble of ascending it, he will find that he is almost the only repre-

sentative of his nation who has done so, and in the visitors' book kept in the turret his John Smith will stand alone among pages of Gustav Brauns and Adolph Bergers.

This idle London life transplanted into Germany, only with more fresh air, more exercise, and more scandal, might be all very well, Eustace said, for people who were used to nothing else—people whose meat and drink consisted in seeing other people, and who would be, or pretend to be, perfectly happy at the North Pole or in the Red Sea, provided they had plenty of their own set about them. Indeed, he himself, knowing no one, and caring to know no one, might have been rather amused than wearied by the comedy playing from seven in the morning till ten at night on this small stage, except for the perpetual thought of the beautiful vision of Baden. By night and by day that vision dwelt with him, tearing at his heart-strings, filling him with a passion of regret, sometimes even with remorse, that he had not pursued it—realized it at all costs; that he had not flung those paltry calculations of her comfort and welfare in the future to the winds, and lingered by her till he could offer her what is, after all, the only thing of worth that a man can offer to a woman—his passionate love

and willingness to wait, and hope, and work, and die for her.

Oh, how different she was from most of the girls he met every day here at Homburg! They were good-natured enough, some of them, and bright and amusing; most of them were very pretty, and all were dressed in symmetrical conformity to the ruling fashion. But he could see nowhere in any face, could hear nowhere in any voice, the faintest indications of a soul like hers. Her simplicity, which was what had struck him in her almost before that fateful train had left the Heidelberg railway station, became a more wonderful thing to him every time that he mused upon it, contrasting it mentally with the cultivated charms of these bevyies of London damsels. In itself, even if combined with the *naïveté* of rusticity and ignorance, this calm, beautiful frankness and singleness of speech and purpose would have appealed to him strongly. He was himself too single-eyed not to be attracted by it in another with magnetic force and swiftness. But in this girl it co-existed with mental gifts evidently very far above the average. She read widely, and she thought deeply, probably—Eustace had arrived at this conclusion by a sort of instinct, not from anything that had passed between them—probably she

wrote with sense and feeling. She had the knowledge of the world, which is not wanting to persons of sense, even where their actual experience of the world is limited; she was every inch a woman—diffident, modest, tender, sensitive to blame and praise. To be all this, yet to have not even the self-consciousness which belongs to sensitiveness, and would seem to be almost a necessary accompaniment of a highly developed receptive faculty, Eustace deemed a thing altogether rare and exquisite. And then her considerateness! her compassion! her intuitive championship of the suffering and the oppressed! Alas! all those strong sympathies of his nature which people called crotchets and crazes and hobbies, and which he had found few men to understand, and no women—she would have understood them!

Eustace had heard once of a certain sweet and gifted soul—a poetess—whose spiritual touch was so acute, whose organization was so subtly wrought, and whose oneness with nature was so complete that she—chained to a couch, or prisoned in an invalid carriage—could tell you, as by second-sight, what plants and flowers were growing in any unfamiliar region where she was.

“Just such an instinct,” Eustace said to him-

self, "Rachel has for all those hidden wrongs that need redress about us and around us; just such a *flair* for the occult sorrows that are caused by human greed and selfishness, injustice and unrighteousness. But for this instinct she could scarcely know that they exist. But it is so strong in her that experience could not make it stronger, or time more true."

Here, again, Eustace read the girl's character so well, because in this particular it was so nearly akin to his own.

At this time, passionately anxious not to cumber the ground when he had been idle so long, and there was still something that even he could do, he was spending his morning over a paper he purposed offering to one of the Reviews on the character and capacities of that section of the native inhabitants of India with which he had most to do. His design was to handle the subject in the abstract, from a literary, not a political, point of view, and so to express his own convictions as to help to modify, without appearing to dictate to public opinion on sundry questions that threatened at the time to become burning ones. He found great solace in this task. It occupied and diverted his thoughts as perhaps nothing but the obliteration of self implied in honest writing

can do, and he found with surprise and delight that the physical weakness and mental torments he had endured had not quenched his literary faculty or slackened the *verve* and energy of his style.

It was his habit to take an early walk in the gardens, visit the milk-cure establishment, and drink his glass with the sprinkling of persons who were, like himself, unorthodox enough to prefer new milk to mineral water. Then he would stroll on to the Elizabeth Brunnen, where all Homburg assembled at seven o'clock in the morning, and where a little later he would see his father with Mrs. Gaston Lorraine, or some other friend, but often escape recognition by him in the crowd. He was always greatly attracted by the flower-stalls close to the spring, which at this hour display their lovely wares in morning freshness—almost nothing but roses—bouquets and button-holes, and *parures* of roses; roses in pyramids, in castles, in ships, in fantastic basket-shapes. Here young ladies throng to have the pick of the stalls and choose for themselves what likes them best; and presently they are all to be seen wearing rosebuds and carrying roses home to decorate their rooms and themselves withal. Eustace generally treated himself to one tea-

rose for his coat. This coat was none of the newest, and the tea-rose looked a little out of place in it; but perhaps that was because so many people wear a rose merely as a sort of climax to an elegant toilet, that one gets to fancy it, too, has come from the tailor's.

One chilly morning—it was damp and drizzling too, and all the girls were clad in dark serges or ulsters, and all the men had their collars turned up, and their thickest boots on, and all the talk was of this abnormal, miserable, Arctic summer—Eustace was peering about among the flower-stalls, as usual, taking up first one bud, and then the other, in the absorbed way shortsighted people have, when a familiar voice close behind him, among the crowd of lady-buyers, made his heart stand still.

“Oh, Rachel, let us have this lovely little basket! Father said we might get something pretty for our room.”

The answer was lost in the buzz of buying and selling around; but the voice was the voice of Margery, and the name she had spoken could only be the name that had been sounding in Eustace's ears since first he heard it like music in a dream. For a moment he stood irresolute, not daring so much as to look in the direction of the voice. When he had

glanced furtively round, he saw the two girls turn away from the shops and go towards the spring, apparently looking for some one. He followed slowly. He had no conception that he had been seen, and little thought that at that moment Margery was saying excitedly to her sister—

“I am quite certain it was Mr. St. Quentin. Why wouldn’t you look? I know it was. He had on the same funny old wideawake, and I saw his eye-glass and everything. Of course he couldn’t see us, poor blind old bat; but I think you might have waited a bit and spoken to him. I can’t think why you want to avoid him. Why do you?”

Margery did not see that her sister’s face was white, or notice that her breath came in gasps as she answered—

“I will tell you why, dear. Don’t look round. Come with me. Come this way. We shall be sure to meet father in the avenue.”

She paused, and hurried her steps a good deal, breathing quickly.

“Yes,” said Margery; “tell me, why do you? I like him so awfully. I think he is a perfect duck. I was fearfully sorry when he went away so suddenly, on account of his stupid old father.”

“I will tell you,” Rachel repeated, in rather an unnatural voice, hurriedly, and as if she did not quite know what she was saying.

“You know when people are thrown together very intimately as we were during those few days, and see a very, very great deal of each other and—and—like one another very much, there is generally something said about meeting again——”

Again she paused for breath.

“Well, didn’t you say anything about meeting again that night?”

“Not a word was said, and—it was very strange.”

“Why didn’t you ask him to come and see us? I’m sure he would have liked to see *you* again. I made sure he was in love with you.”

“It does not do,” Rachel said, speaking more calmly now, and merely as though she were discussing an abstract point of etiquette, “to ask gentlemen to come and see you, unless they let you see very plainly that they expect and would like an invitation. At least, I do not care to do it. And he said not a syllable that night that I—that any one could construe into a wish to meet again. I can hardly explain to you; it was very peculiar——”

“I know!” said Margery, suddenly, after a

moment's reflection. "Perhaps his head is a little queer! Don't you think he may have had sunstroke or something in India? He struck me as a little peculiar sometimes."

"Possibly," said Rachel, with a dreary smile. "But, however that may be, it was evident he did not want to see more of us, and I do not care—that we should thrust ourselves upon him. If he sees us and speaks to us, well and good; but that is not very likely, as he is so shortsighted. I am sorry now that we came here——"

"I don't see that," said Margery. Of course she did not, and Rachel instantly regretted her remark. "I suppose we have as much right here as he; and if he wishes to avoid us, he can go away. But I can't help thinking you've made some mistake. He seemed such a dear, kind old thing. I never saw any one with such nice manners. I believe he'd be delighted to see us."

At that moment a middle-aged gentleman, looking like a retired officer, took off his hat to Margery. She bowed to him, blushing as red as a peony.

"That is the man who sat next me at *table d'hôte* last night. I think it is very kind of him to bow to me. I was so rude to him.

He made himself very agreeable, and really he was very nice ; but I suppose I had a shy fit or something. I scarcely answered him, and I overheard him whisper something about a snub to his wife."

"Well, you know you can freeze," said Rachel. "You want a little more of the Laodicean about you, Madge. You are either too hot or too cold. But don't be discouraged ; you are making progress. Mrs. Howard said yesterday she thought you had charming manners."

"Not really !"

"She did, indeed. And, seriously dear, your manners are very much improved. You must not allow yourself to feel anxious. Ah, there they are ! Let us give Mrs. Howard these roses ; they are the nicest."

Eustace, loitering in the background was near enough to see the bright look on Rachel's face as she offered the flowers to her new friend. Then he saw Mrs. Howard put her arm through Rachel's, and the two left the avenue together, followed by Margery and her father, and his old college friend. By that time it was raining fast, and all the water-drinkers were hastening home under their umbrellas ; and it was easy for Eustace, mingling with the crowd, who were

for the most part going the same way, to observe what direction the little party ultimately took. He tracked them to the Untere Promenade, and, strange to say, to the very house part of which was now tenanted by Mrs. Lorraine and her daughter. This house was one of the best in the street. It had a lovely garden, and balconies draped with flowering creepers, where luxurious lounging chairs would have invited to the dreamiest *dolce far niente* in a more normal season. And this house was, perhaps, more frequented by Mr. Chester St. Quentin than any other in Homburg!

IX.

EUSTACE's writing did not progress rapidly that morning. In fact, to speak truth, he did not write a word. In a fever of excitement, suspense, and indecision, he paced up and down his room, now resolved to rush to that house in the Untere Promenade, now determined to quit Homburg by the next train; one moment intending to warn his father, the next deciding that this time he should leave him to make the discovery of Mr. Vibert's presence for himself.

He was not all miserable. This wonderful

and unexpected turn of fate, which had brought once more within his ken the joy he had abandoned and turned his back on, seemed to him—he could not tell why—an omen of good. The very sight of her had filled him with hope—hope absolutely unreasoning, but yet somehow quite as real as though it had been logically deduced from the facts. It could not be for nothing that they had been brought together again. The voice of his own heart said too plainly, “She has been brought back to me. It cannot be in vain! No, no! It cannot be in vain!”

But while the heart gave thanks and sang for joy, the will remained irresolute. As the hours went by, it did not become clearer to Eustace how to act.

It has been said of a French writer, whose pure, true thinking has recently flashed upon the world in an autobiography, “The infirmity which made his life so unproductive sprang from the very grandeur of his ideal and the breadth of his thought.”

It was some such noble infirmity as this that had clogged the footsteps of Eustace St. Quentin all his life long, and that was now hampering and tormenting him. Another man, as conscious as he was that all his happiness depended

on winning this girl's love, would have sought it at all hazards, trusting to his own strength of will to carry the day and to somehow earn a competency upon which ultimately to marry. But with Eustace it was otherwise. The dread of selfishness, in taking such a course, bound him hand and foot, and a variety of minor considerations, which would never have occurred to a mind less delicately poised, kept his in suspense. Was it not cruel to mix up this sweet woman in a painful and discreditable feud, of which she evidently knew nothing, and which she would realize for the first time when her affianced husband should tell her that he had not a relation in the world to whom he could present her? Then, for aught he knew, he might be doomed to a future of greater or less invalidism, and the mere possibility of overclouding her young life with a trouble of that sort made him shudder. Again, disappointment and failure, together with over-much study and perhaps over-much thought in a world

“Where but to think is to be full of sorrow,”

had depressed him till he felt himself too unjoyous for that constant intimate communion of married life which means the impossibility, do what one may, of keeping sorrow to oneself.

In this way the day wore on. At length, between four and five o'clock in the afternoon, unable to endure the society of his own thoughts a moment longer, Eustace, well-nigh distraught, and quite without any intention beyond that of somehow breathing the outer air, rushed out of the Hotel into the street. He ran into the arms of Margery and Mrs. Howard, who were coming out of the flower shop adjoining the Hotel Victoria.

Margery, taken by surprise, instantly made up her mind to act on her own judgment and not according to the programme recommended by her sister in the morning. She liked this man. He had been kind and "jolly" to her. She was convinced that there was a mistake somewhere, and that Rachel, for once, had got a wrong idea as to his wishing to drop them.

She extended her hand to him with a charming cordiality.

"Oh, Mr. St. Quentin, I am so glad to see you again! We caught a glimpse of you this morning, but you didn't see us. How very funny, our meeting again, isn't it? Father got quite ill at Baden, and the doctor recommended us to try this place. It is quite a different air. He is ever so much better already. But he

tired himself out this morning, and he is all alone now, and you know he never likes that, so I am going back to sit with him. Were you at the band just now? We were all there, till father said he must go in and rest, and then the others went down to the tennis-ground."

While she talked, the two ladies made a few steps forward, and Eustace had no choice but to walk beside them.

Margery went on to tell him that Mr. and Mrs. Howard had most fortunately been coming to Homburg, which was an added inducement to them to do likewise. Besides—was it not lucky?—their friends had engaged two rooms in the same house with themselves for some people who had intended to join them and had been prevented at the last moment. It was a brother and two sisters, so that their own little party exactly fitted the rooms.

Mrs. Howard here remarked that there could not have been a happier coincidence, as far as she and her husband were concerned. Mr. Howard had not expected such a pleasure as to meet a very old friend in that curious chance way, and the two were never tired of exchanging old college reminiscences and memories of vacations spent together in Ireland in the maddest, wildest manner, to judge by the tales they

told. It was most fortunate that they had not been obliged to separate.

"And did you come straight here from Frankfort?" Margery asked, with her fingers on the latch of the garden gate in the Untere Promenade. "How strange our coming here, too! We never thought we should see you again—in Germany, I mean."

She threw the gate wide open, and stood beside it, waiting for the other two to enter. It seemed not to have occurred to her that Eustace was not coming in to see her father.

"Oh, do come in! It would amuse—he would be so pleased to see you again," she said, in response to some halting excuse.

"I promised to join the others at the tennis-ground," said Mrs. Howard, turning aside into the gardens, while Eustace still stood irresolute.

At that moment Mrs. Gaston Lorraine's French maid came running out of the house and through the little luxuriant garden to the gate.

She was charged with the compliments of Madame Gaston Lorraine to mademoiselle, and was to say that madame was at that moment receiving the visit of monsieur her father, and would she do her the honour to drink a cup of tea with her likewise? She had been instructed

to watch for mademoiselle, and to let her know where monsieur her father could be found.

Margery stared at the woman in astonishment. She was for a moment too much surprised to notice the expression, half-bewildered, half horror-struck, on Eustace's face. Then her own broke into a smile.

"Another old friend, of course!" she whispered laughingly to Eustace. "Gaston Lorraine is evidently the name of the other people in this house, and my father, of course, has found out that he knows them."

"I know her, too," Eustace whispered in reply. "But—I don't think—that you and your sister will like her very much."

"You know her, too! Oh, then you must come with me!"

But he shook his head, and turned back towards the gate, while Margery went into the house. He had not closed it behind him when he heard his name called.

"Mr. St. Quentin, you are not running away, are you? I have friends of yours here. Do come in."

It was Mrs. Lorraine herself. She had come out into the balcony to see if it was warm enough to have tea there, and had caught sight of Eustace's retreating figure.

He had no choice but to obey her. Still feeling much more like a man in a painful and perplexing dream than like a waking person, he mounted the stairs. The French maid who had announced Margery was at the door, and showed him into a dainty little drawing-room, where some half-dozen persons were assembled. Exactly opposite to him as he went in sat two gentlemen, who appeared to be engaged in friendly chat.

"Then it must have been your brother that I knew," the one was saying to the other, blandly.

Eustace never knew what he said in answer to Mrs. Lorraine's greeting and playful charges of avoiding her in the most shameless way. For one of these two gentlemen, the speaker, was the father of Rachel; and the other, the one who was listening graciously, with a gesture of acquiescence, was his own!

"We are a party of old friends to-day," Mrs. Lorraine went on. "You need no introduction to Mr. McNaghten Veysey. He and I met on the stairs just now and recognized each other, though we have not met for a thousand years, and it seems that he knew your father—your uncle, was it?—in old times."

While Eustace stood stupefied, looking vaguely round the room for the person indicated, his old

acquaintance of the railway carriage advanced towards him, and grasped his hand affectionately.

"I am delighted, delighted to see you," he said warmly, putting his arm through Eustace's and drawing him into the window, while Mrs. Lorraine took the seat he had just vacated, and began talking to Chester St. Quentin. "It is a real pleasure to me. I was so vexed to find you were obliged to leave Baden so unexpectedly. I had hoped we should make more pleasant trips together. And I believe I have got to apologize to you for a very stupid blunder. I was looking the other day in my pocket-book for a name I wanted—a man we met at Brussels—and I could not find his card anywhere; and it has struck me that I must have given it away to some one in mistake for one of my own. Now, could I have given it to you?"

For a moment, Eustace was silent. Then with a strange pallor, lowering his voice to a whisper, he said, "The name on the card you gave me was Austin Vibert."

"Of course! so it was! That was the name," returned the other. "Poor man, he was in great trouble—recalled suddenly from the continent, on account of his wife's illness. So you have been under the impression my

name was Vibert all this time. How odd! I am so vexed at my stupidity. The fact is, my eyes are not quite what they were; and, if you recollect, it was dark that evening. Dear me! dear me! I thought you seemed puzzled just now!"

"May I ask you," said Eustace, still speaking under his breath, "to say nothing of this curious episode just at present? The name in question is one of evil omen to some in this room, and better not mentioned. If you will allow me, I shall give myself the pleasure of calling on you to-morrow, when I can explain matters."

Mr. Veysey nodded.

"Come in the morning," he said. "We are going to see this Roman castle in the afternoon."

A little later, as Chester St. Quentin and his son were walking home together, the former remarked casually that he knew McNaghten Veysey very well by name. He had the reputation of being the greatest talker in Norfolk.

"So you had met them before, had you?" he inquired of Eustace.

"Yes. He was the pawnbroker."

"The what? Oh, ah! So that was the pretty daughter, was it? H'm. Not bad; but no manner. Just out of the nursery."

"Mr. Veysey gives one the impression of an Irishman," remarked Eustace.

"He is Irish. His name was McNaghten. Mrs. Lorraine has just been telling me he took the name of Veysey from his wife. This property in Norfolk belonged to her—somewhere near Lynn, isn't it?"

So the Celt was a Celt after all!

* * * * *

Another week at Homburg had passed away, but this week had flown by as weeks do fly when the heart is full of comfort, and the oil of joy has been granted in place of mourning.

As Mr. Chester St. Quentin had one day hinted *à propos* of paying court to heiresses, there is no place like a foreign watering-place for affording opportunities of meeting to persons who desire to see more of one another; and of all foreign watering-places, Homburg is perhaps the one where such opportunities most abound. The space is very limited; excursions are not the fashion; society revolves all day long round two or three centres, and you can tell where your friends will be, at any given hour of the day, beyond the possibility of mistake.

And almost all day long—save for the two or three morning hours during which Eustace

devoted an unburdened mind, overflowing with the force which is born of sympathy, and the courage that comes with love to his writing—almost all day long he was in Rachel's company, telling all his thoughts to her, hearing from her lips the strength and nobleness and beauty of her own. At first, love was not spoken of, but it was breathed in every word, and expressed in every look, and understood in every gesture, and perhaps never before did it come with so much helpfulness and divine sweetness to any human soul as to this vexed, solitary, storm-tossed one. It laid to rest all doubt, dispelled all scruple, quieted all fear. He understood now that these things troubled him only before he had read in her eyes that his own secret was also hers.

One wet evening there was dancing at the Curhaus, and all the rooms were crowded; and Eustace, who had been afraid to dance since that night at Baden, asked her if she would come out into the covered passage, near the entrance, where it was cool, and there were only a few people walking up and down. And as they, too, walked up and down together, he bent his head a little, and said slowly—

“There was a Rachel once who was so beautiful that seven years of waiting seemed

like seven days to one who wooed her. And I will most gladly serve for you seven years, dear, if you will let me. Only I do not deceive myself. I have suffered so much, and waited so long for my happiness, that the seven years will seem to me, not seven days, but seven centuries."

"But there is no need for you to wait at all," she said; "for I love you with all my heart."

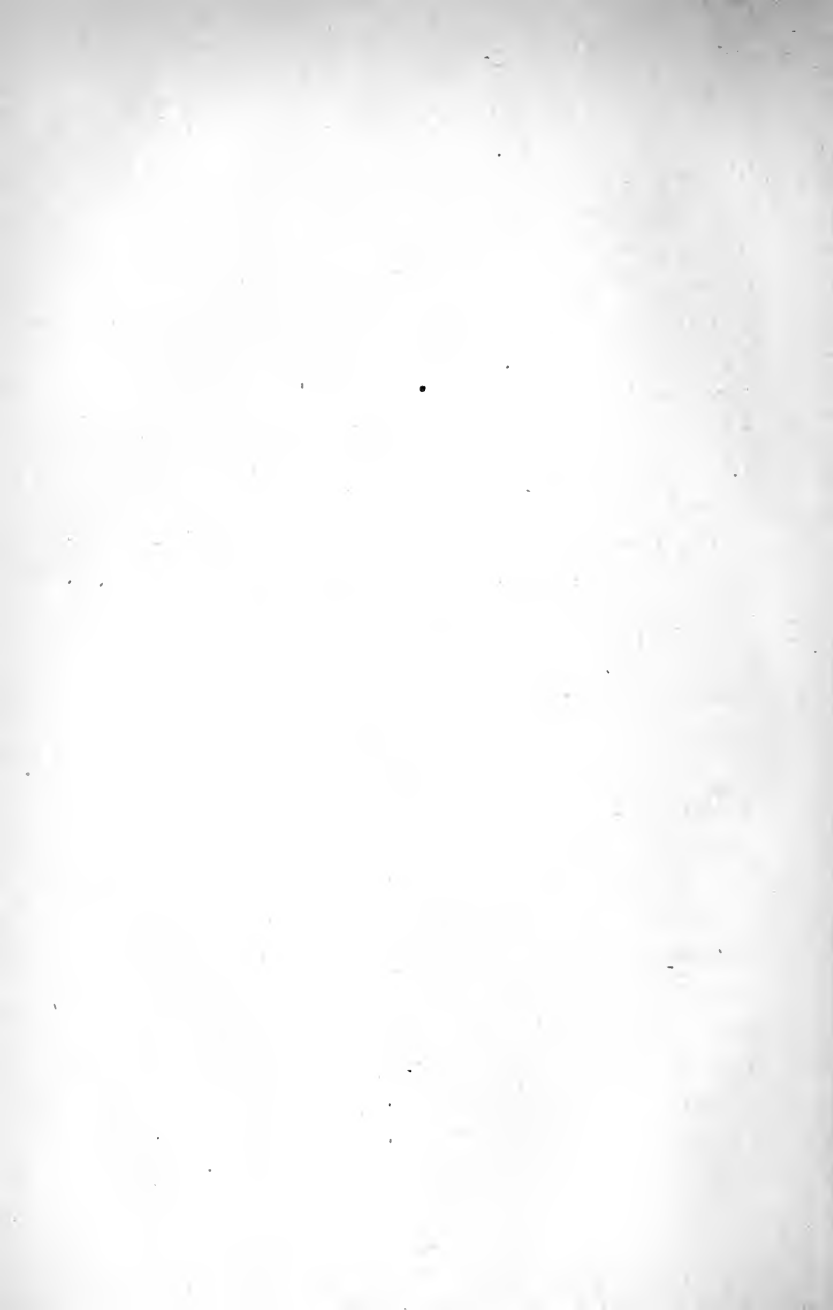
They walked to the end of the lobby in silence—and part of the way back again.

Then, with an effort, he said, "But I must live by my wits somehow. I cannot accept more than a pittance from my father. I do not care to do that. I know you understand——"

"It will be only for a time," she said. "You will devote yourself to literature. You will make that your career, and——"

"And if I fail?"

"If you fail," she said, "the world will be the poorer, for you would never give it what was not generous and noble and true. You will never give but of your best, and I know what your best is. Oh yes, the world would be the poorer—but—not—your wife."



MILLY AND THE Q.C.



MILLY AND THE Q.C.



I.

A COUNCIL of war was being held at old Captain Fenning's, or rather in the house which, a week ago, had been his. For the old man was dead at last, after months and even years of dying from slow paralysis; the funeral was over, the will read, the final arrangements made, the last would-be legatees gone away empty.

For everything had been left to Milly Dasent, old Aaron Fenning's niece and adopted daughter—everything—that is to say, a comfortable red-brick villa, a dozen acres of valuable land, and a round fifty-thousand pounds. That was more than anybody expected. It was true Milly had been her uncle's most devoted attendant, one might say slave, for ten years, but other rela-

tives had paid their respects very punctually. It seemed hard that they should not be even "remembered." There was one, in particular, who, with every endeavour to be high-minded, could not altogether repress a just sense of injury. This was Milly's only brother, Robert, a young barrister, whom old Aaron had consulted upon legal points ever since he was called, and who had always, in a son-like way, repudiated all suggestions of remuneration. He was the only very near relation, except Milly, and it should have been recollected that it was his mother, as well as Milly's, who had been old Aaron's only sister. The house might have been Milly's and welcome, but the personal property should have been divided equally between them.

"Yes," said Nigel Maurice, the solicitor Robert had himself appointed to draw up the fateful will; "but how could your sister have kept up this place on a thousand a year?"

"Easily, by letting the land," said Dasent. (Through the open window you could hear Milly's alderneys munching the meadow-grass hard by the lawn.) "What does a woman want with land? Besides, she is sure to marry. I tell you what it is, Maurice; you kept the secret uncommonly well."

"How could I help it?" said Nigel, who was

an old college-chum of Bob Dasent's, and had felt, for divers reasons, very like a conspirator ever since the making of that will. "I can tell you I disliked the job excessively, especially when Captain Fenning went out of his way to swear me to secrecy. But we all know what he was. I knew that whether *I* made that will or not, it *would be made*."

"Now, you two, you have gone over that often enough," put in Lina, Bob's wife, who was drawing in the window. "Do let us return to the point, Bob, before Nigel goes."

"Well, what I wanted to say to you is this," said Bob, who took his time over everything, like a true *alumnus* of the Chancery branch of the law. "We have been making a little plan this morning, Lina and I, in which you were included. I wonder if you would like to join us in a short expedition to Exmoor? The fact is, Milly is looking so wretched, we feel we must get her away for a thorough change; and I believe there is no place like Exmoor."

Lina laughed.

"Bob has been dying to go there ever since he read with Mr. Lennard," she said. "You know Exmoor is one of Mr. Lennard's hobbies, and bread-reform the other."

"Lennard is quite right," said Bob, gravely.

"It is splendid, both as to air and scenery. And in weather like this——"

"I should like to join you very much indeed," said Nigel. "I've been grinding away all the Vacation, and I think I've earned a bit of a holiday."

You would have said a ton at least had been removed from Nigel's breast. He drew a long breath, and his countenance opened quite visibly. He felt now that his pardon for being concerned in that will was sealed; and he felt—not so definitely, to be sure—but still he felt great complacency in the prospect of a tour with an heiress.

"What place would Lennard recommend for head-quarters?" he asked in a business-like way.

"I must talk to him about that," said Bob, in a tone implying familiar intercourse with this bright particular ornament of his profession, James Lennard, the eminent Q.C. and great authority upon patents. And, in fact, he was rather a pet of the great man, who had detected his ability and predicted the respectable degree of success that had attended his ten years' practice at the Chancery Bar. "I believe he particularly affects a little place called Porlock."

"Lorna Doone, don't you know?" put in Lina.

The two young men looked knowing, but could not call to mind much of the romance in question, beyond some stirring scenes in connection with a nest of outlaws. Young men have bad memories about novels; and even such an epoch-making novel as this, fragrant, strong, unique, profoundly English, more profoundly human, stays longest with the womenkind.

"Our main object," proceeded Bob gravely in his *rôle* of family adviser, and chief caretaker of a burdened heiress, "will be, of course, Milly—to divert her mind, and shake her out of herself a little, and get her out of the odd, morbid, invalidish ways she has got into."

"Of course," echoed Nigel, approvingly. "Of course she will be the first object."

Whereupon Robert Dasent pretended to go and look at his wife's drawing, that he might have the opportunity of giving her a wink.

Lina, morbidly polite, and fearful lest Nigel should detect the plot, gave him a frown.

"You see, Nigel," she presently observed, smoothing her brow, and speaking with extra seriousness, "apart from all poor Uncle Aaron's worrying, Milly has had things preying on her own mind which have brought her to this state."

"Indeed," said Nigel, with less interest than he felt. He had only seen Milly once or twice before, when he had run down to the Croft on old Captain Fenning's business. The girl had been tied there hand and foot, and had had little opportunity of making acquaintance with her brother's friends. He now, without surprise, but with some regret, scented an affair of the heart. He understood that that was what usually preyed on young ladies' minds.

"Well, she has taken up some rather queer philanthropic notions," continued Lina. "She has a mission to all the young women in the place, from the shop-girls who make you positively tremble with their grandeur and patronage—how she can dream of facing them I can't think!—down to the riff-raff——"

"How very odd!" put in Nigel, as Lina hesitated.

"Yes; and as Uncle Aaron positively forbade her going into the slums, or even getting friends with those fearful swells in the shops, she's been breaking her heart; that's the long and the short of it."

"Fancy!" said Nigel. One of his own sisters taught in the Sunday school when she was not paying visits, and another left tracts at certain houses in the village once a fortnight;

but break their hearts about such things! The only time he ever saw them really unhappy was when their ball-dresses arrived from town a day too late. He thought he ought to say something more intelligent than "Fancy!" so he added very sapiently, "Well, all that will be set right now. She is her own mistress, and will be able to indulge her propensity to the utmost. I am sure it is a highly laudable one."

"Don't be too sure of that," interrupted Bob, with an inward shudder at certain of Milly's "crotchets," and the experiences to which her "mission" would have led in a fashionable watering-place. "Poor old uncle was perfectly right—I mean, to a very great extent. Milly means well, but there is no saying to what extremes she will go."

"Would have gone, you mean," corrected Lina. "She's quite changed now. She hasn't spirit or heart for anything of the kind now."

"That's physical," said Bob.

"I'm not so sure," said his wife. "I don't exactly know what 'physical' is; but I know that long before Uncle Aaron got worse she seemed quite changed in character. Don't you remember how bright and full of fun she used to be, and rather fond of her own way?"

Now she is as grave as a judge, and so undecided and indifferent about things. It was quite a year ago that, when we were talking over the shop-girl business together one day, she burst out crying, and told me she didn't care an atom about it."

"Oh, but she will regain her nerve!" said Nigel. "We must, as you say, do everything to divert and cheer her. Living in the open air and talking nonsense for a few weeks will do wonders, you'll see."

"Well, we shall count on your assistance," said Lina. "I'm delighted you can come. You are right about the nonsense. Not a word of sense——"

"I am so vexed, I forgot to order an early luncheon," said a plaintive voice in the doorway; "but I have told them to get ready everything there is at once. I do hope you will forgive me, Mr. Maurice. I have such a very, very stupid memory."

Nigel sprang, protesting, to his feet, as a tall, fair woman entered, looking hesitatingly, not so much at him as all about her. Noiselessly and with a subtle grace she entered, the plain black dress she wore setting off her height and the exquisitely delicate texture of her skin. But she moved like a restless spirit rather than

like a living woman. She did not seem to know where to sit down, or whom to speak to, or how to atone for her grievous lapse. She bent over Lina for a moment, then she pulled a dead flower out of the vase, then she raised the window blinds a little.

Her hands were very thin, though her face and figure were not; her large grey eyes and slightly contracted brow had an expression of intense weariness and restlessness combined; her hair was light brown, abundant and beautiful. She was, on the whole, beautiful; she was interesting; she was twenty-seven; she was the fortunate heiress, Milly.

II.

A CRITIC on the look-out for human shortcomings—those critics who are not are probably misnamed, and would be more fitly called romancists—might have taken exception to the way of life which prevailed during the next few days at the Croft. There was but little said or done to suggest the recent demise of the head of the house; a tone of tranquil cheerfulness, almost of gaiety, prevailed; there was no visiting, but there were daily walks,

drives, and rides in the country, and to the big adjacent town; there was a furtive inspection of a Loan Exhibition; and there was a stolen concert or so. A twofold reason could be assigned for this. In the first place it was good for Milly. In the second place, if it had been bad for Milly, it would not have been a bit of use trying to act differently. . Nobody had loved Aaron Fenning living, and nobody had the hypocrisy to pretend to love him dead.

And yet he was not a bad-hearted old man; he was not a miser, or a scamp, or savage, or even grossly selfish. He was simply a despot—a man who could not conceive that there could be two opinions upon any given subject; who would crush the life out of you, without knowing it, sooner than make room beside his own opinion for yours. And he was also intensely, unutterably grave. He never in all his life had talked a word of what Nigel and Lina called “nonsense.” Long before illness came upon him, he had been as lugubrious as a man under sentence of death; he stunned you with fact, he slew you with reality, he stupified you with sense.

It was true that when Milly came to live with him at seventeen, after her parents' death, she was as bright a maid as ever kissed and laughed

the weight of years from off an old man's brow. She had had her mournful moods—what true heart, even of sweet, spoiled maiden has not?—but they were rare and unperceived. And now it was her smiles that were so seldom seen, people grew to forget her natural lightsomeness of heart. Year by year the smiles grew rarer, and year by year the fount of laughter languished, till at last the nervous system suffered—as it will suffer from too long a famine of life's natural food of joy—and Milly learned to start and stammer and lie awake at nights, and to tremble at the trembling of a leaf. If she had had a little more self-assertion; if, when she attained to years of discretion, she had quietly insisted on taking her own way, given the rein to her “mission,” and told her uncle plainly that, anxious as she was to pay him all love and duty, she would prefer her own pittance and liberty to the Croft and spiritual bondage, things might have been different. But then Milly would not have been Milly. She had her own notions of her duty to the old man who had adopted her, even before he became ill; she could not bear to desert him, or even to vex and thwart; she shrank from the wrangling that would have been forced upon her as from hideousness and

sin; she preferred to devour her heart in silence.

It is a tragic combination this of a strong character with an acutely sensitive conscience. Where it exists there will always be friction, often torture, sometimes a slow death.

Bob and Lina little dreamed that they were, so to speak, tightening the screw upon Milly, in taking her to the town so often. They had better have kept to country rides. The sight of the place where she might have done so much, and had done nothing, hurt her; the finery in the shop-windows hurt her; the officers from the garrison strolling down High Street (of whom the world was not worthy) hurt her; the fashionable women going to and from the bands in marvellous attire, and still more marvellous make-up, hurt her.

Morbid? Yes; Milly had grown very morbid.

One evening—it was Saturday night, and they were to start for Exmoor on the Monday—there was to be an open-air concert in some gardens by the sea. Bob Dasent proposed going, and would hear of no objections from Lina on the score of the mourning, or from Milly on the score of disinclination. It was not like a daylight affair; they could keep themselves to themselves, and hear without being seen.

It chanced, however, that the night was singularly clear and unclouded. The full moon shone forth in her strength, turning half the sea to silver, and spreading silver over the feathery tops of the tamarisks in the garden. But for a thick veil that Milly wore, she would have been compelled to greet more than one acquaintance. Her brother and sister were not so well known in the place. But all of a sudden one of the promenaders stopped in front of Dasent's chair, with an astonished—

“Why, Bob!”

“Hullo, Nigel!”

He had been going to look them up the next day, Nigel said, but he did not wish to wear out his welcome at the Croft. He had had nothing to do in town, and thought he might just as well run down for the Sunday. What a spell of jolly weather they were in for! It would do Miss Dasent a great deal of good! How perfect it would be for Exmoor! And it would last, too. Had they been there long? Had they heard the piper-fellows? Ah! they were just going to play again. If they crossed the garden they would see them.

So the trio got up, and Lina slipped her arm through her husband's, so that Milly had no choice but to walk with young Maurice.

"How very lucky I am to have run across you!" Nigel said to his companion, as they threaded their way through the chairs and groups of people.

"Yes; I am so glad we met," Milly said. "I have been wanting so much to see you."

There she stopped, quite innocently. She was very tired, and the sentences do not come right when one is very tired. She knew her rejoinder sounded too affectionate, but she could not take the trouble to finish.

"I am very happy," said Nigel, significantly.

"Yes?" said Milly, absently.

It was a romantic night, warm for September, and rarely beautiful. There was a buzz of laughing or of whispering voices all round; while up and down the moonlit lawns four pipers of a Highland regiment marched, playing "On the Banks of Allan Water." Nigel felt it incumbent on him to lose no time. When, even on Exmoor, could he have a more favourable opportunity?

"If I had known that," he went on, with warmth, "I should have been here before now. Business should have been sent to the four winds. And I should have postponed paying my respects to my new stepmother——"

"What would Sir John have said?" inter-

rupted Milly, calmly, taking as little notice as they deserved of his compliments. "Besides, my business was not so pressing as all that."

"Business!"

Nigel was a little taken aback. He was then only wanted in his character of solicitor.

"Shall we walk round? I have heard the pipers often enough," said Milly, wearily.

He obeyed, and Lina gave Bob's arm a squeeze, as the two moved further away from where they stood.

"Look at them! It's beginning already!"

"Old Nigel's quite on the spot," said Bob, with equal glee.

"It really was a grand idea of yours," said Lina. "He is so nice—such a thorough gentleman—and not a pauper, though of course a little money——"

"And he has done me many a good turn," put in the barrister, "and will do me a good many more when he gets this new partnership."

"Which he can do at once, if he marries Milly. Oh, I wonder whether she'll have him! I would if I were she. Really, Bob, apart from its being such a good thing for you, it seems such a very nice thing in every way. He's just the right age—two or three and thirty; he's just in want of such a lift; he's got so much

common-sense, he can put up with Milly's vagaries, if he can't cure her of them; he's exceedingly good-looking——”

And so on, and so on. Needless to say that the advantages of a match between Nigel and Milly were being canvassed for the hundred and fiftieth time, and that the arch-conspirators did not easily weary of the subject. There was some excuse for their pursuing it now, and for their feeling a considerable degree of elation that the plot should have begun to work so soon.

Meanwhile Milly was unfolding her “business” to her cavalier.

“It will hardly surprise you,” she began sedately—it did surprise Nigel very much indeed—“that I wish to make over some of that money to Bob. In fact, I wish him to have half, and I should have liked it done before we left home.”

“Good heavens!” said Nigel.

“Why?” said Milly.

“Well, I mean, you surprise me. So very sudden. I never contemplated such a thing. It is so impracticable——”

“Why?” said Milly again, in a way Nigel would have thought very provoking if he had not been at a moonlight concert with a pretty heiress.

“Quite out of the question, I assure you, my dear Miss Dasent,” he resumed, with a charming affectation of the paternal family man of business. “Your intention is excellent. I admire you for it, I like you for it; but you see, you have not had much acquaintance with affairs. You must do nothing so rash without taking the mature opinion of competent people, people you can confide in and rely on. If I were to be so highly honoured——”

“I wanted your advice,” broke in Milly, quietly, “Bob says you are my solicitor now.”

Nigel bowed profoundly; but Milly, who had her eyes on the ground, was only conscious of a certain contortion of his shadow. She did not know what a naïve thing she had said, and could not guess what an odd expression of mixed annoyance and amusement there was upon his face.

“My advice,” said Nigel, “would certainly be to abandon the idea altogether, at least, for the present.”

“But it’s just now Bob wants it,” said Milly, plaintively. “The lease of the Cottage at Wimbledon is on the point of expiring, and they have their eye on such a nice new house. I know Bob had been counting on something. I thought, perhaps, you could have prepared the

deed of gift—isn't that what it's called—before we went away?"

"You're quite right," said Nigel, smiling at the unusual amount of technical knowledge displayed by his companion, who was really as ignorant of everything pertaining to "business" as it is still considered fitting and fortunate for a woman to be. "A deed of gift *would* be necessary, if you insisted on dividing your legacy before the estate has been collected and the debts paid."

"How long will all that take?" interrupted Milly, alarmed.

"Oh, from six months to a year," said Nigel. Then seizing his advantage, he proceeded to frighten her well with all the drawbacks—legal, social, and moral—to so unadvised a course. The legal question was dwelt on at especial length, because the long words did duty for arguments, and the learned phrases could be made to sound like objections.

It must not be supposed that Nigel Maurice was actuated by any unworthy personal motives in the line he was taking. All his lawyer-like instincts were opposed to anything like quixotry, especially when it took him unawares; and if Milly's generous madness had been in his own favour, he would have felt it his duty to re-

monstrate quite as strongly. There was nothing venal, nothing of the greedy fortune-hunter about the young man. He was a gentleman and a man of honour by birth and training. He was very like other people, that was all. He had been contemplating matrimony for some time, and he had not—who has?—that fastidious shrinking from the thought of money in connection with the thought of marriage which would have kept him out of Milly Dasent's way.

It did not take long to frighten Milly now. Some time before Nigel had finished his harangue, she felt that she had acted childishly, and when he stopped to take breath, she was not quite sure that she had not acted criminally.

"Thank you very much. I will think over all you have said. Shall we find the others?" she said.

The others were easily found, as they had stuck to their chairs for the last half-hour, so as to leave Milly and her man of business quite undisturbed. The band of the Highland regiment was playing the last waltz on the programme. The groups of people were thinning.

Milly sank down upon her chair with a shiver, and drew her wraps about her as though it had been cold. Her heart was not keeping time with the merry music. Once more that

strange paralysis seemed to have crept over her will, that strange indifference over her desire. She felt her aim defeated, her purpose broken by a mere nothing—a young man's talk—and she did not seem to greatly care. She was crying quietly under her veil, but that was common with her now. It was sheer nervousness and weakness.

Lina chatted gaily to the two men as they strolled along the cliff to meet the carriage. She was a bright, healthy-minded woman, the sunshine of her home and of the society she chanced to be in. She was thoroughly kind-hearted, but she had a rare and very happy knack of feeling—feeling truly, too—without suffering.

And she had known sorrow. That night, when she went up to her room in the moonlight, she went straight to a cupboard, where a small black coat and hat were hanging, both trimmed with Astrakhan fur. She laid the soft fur to her lips, and she passed it over her cheek ; and she said her prayers that night—as she did every night—with her face hidden in that little coat.

But when Bob came up she was quite prepared for a lively chat, or, if he were too late, to throw the pillow at him.

III.

It can be very hot climbing a hillside late in September. Milly, to whom the Exmoor breezes had not yet restored her full strength, was fain to stop many times on the way up to Dunkery Beacon, and fling herself down on a tuft of fern or ling to rest. Bob and Lina, who were as strong as two Exmoor ponies, laughed at her, and would have it that she was such a swell now with her property, and her horses and carriages, that she considered it undignified to be able to walk. They were always talking that kind of "nonsense." They thought, very rightly, that it was better than acknowledging and humouring her languor.

"Come on, Milly! Don't be affected!" shouted Bob, from a superior altitude of some hundred feet.

"Don't be lazy!" rang out the clear voice of Lina from a similar height.

But there was some one at Milly's feet who did not think her affected, and who rather liked her to be lazy. He was stretched at full length on the carpeted hill-side, and, having heard that Milly was fond of bilberries, he was searching

diligently for any belated ones that should chance to be within arm's reach.

A change had come over Nigel Maurice in the last week. He had begun by wishing to "get married," and he had ended by something very like loving. He had joined the expedition to Exmoor in what had been, if not a calculating, at least a business-like spirit. After a few days at Porlock he found himself beginning to think less of settling down than of being happy, less of Milly's fortune than of Milly's self. It was very strange. He had been in love before, but he had never felt like this. He did not quite recognize himself. What gave this gentle, quiet, timorous woman—too gentle, too quiet, too timorous—her fascination? There was some colour in her face now. It lit up oftener; sometimes, in some such scene of passing beauty as this, it would seem transfigured. But she spoke little. She had not the elastic step with which Lina bounded over miles of moor; she still lived in another world, which was not the world of sport, and business, and love-making, and Nigel Maurice.

"Miss Dasent," said Nigel, abruptly, as he handed her two bilberries the size of pins' heads, "do you know, I would give a great deal to know what you are thinking of."

"I was thinking of the forbidden subject," answered Milly at once, with one of her faint smiles.

"That is very naughty of you. You know you promised me faithfully not to think of it again till the end of our holiday."

"Did I? I thought I promised not to *speak* of it."

"Well, isn't that the same thing—with a lady?" said Nigel, rallying her playfully on the "nonsense" principle.

He only got another vague smile.

"But, as you have begun the subject," he went on, "and as you are looking so much better already that perhaps business needn't be *entirely* tabooed, I will just say this—How can you contemplate living at the Croft, even if you let the land, on half your income?"

"I don't contemplate such a thing for a moment," said Milly. "I intend—I mean I had intended—living in London."

"Indeed!"

"Yes," said Milly. "I believe there are people—clergymen's widows, and that kind of thing—who take boarders, aren't there? I should like to be in a kind family—I mean, where they would be kind to me, and yet allow me to go and come when I pleased."

"But why, in the name of all that's wonderful," exclaimed Milly's man of business, "do you wish to do this, when you could live in such comfort at the Croft? I am putting your generous intentions towards your brother out of the question for the moment. And you need never be lonely. You know some of the Mostyns and the Hamiltons, to say nothing of all your other relations, would be only too delighted to be with you. And if it comes to loneliness——"

There Nigel broke off abruptly, and ceased looking up into Milly's face, returning significantly to his bilberries.

"I don't think you would understand why," said Milly. She did not mean it discourteously. Only from having never yet found any one who did understand, she had come to feel it was the natural thing.

"Shouldn't I?" said Nigel, rather pathetically. "I think I should, if you would tell me."

"Well, it is that London is such a field for—work of all sorts," said Milly. "I am particularly interested in young girls."

"There's certainly no lack of *them* in London," interrupted Nigel, with a laugh that somehow jarred Milly.

“And in every way the facilities there are far greater. And I should like to begin where I am not known. One is nobody in great London. Then, if I went into a quiet, unfashionable part, I suppose I could live for very little——”

“And give all the rest away! I know,” said Nigel. “So that is your little scheme!” Then, quite forgetting that he was to try and “understand”—“My dear Miss Dasent,” he began, seriously, “you are a great deal too good for this world. You have been planning how you can sacrifice yourself and your own interests in every conceivable way, and if you had not friends to step in and protect you from yourself, I really don’t know what would become of you. Your generosity and unselfishness, as I have often told you before, are admirable; but you really must not be allowed to give them the rein, or you will end in enthusiasm and—and——”

“Uncle Aaron used to talk about ‘enthusiasm,’” put in Milly, quietly, while Nigel was hunting for a word that should be telling enough to convince, yet not severe enough to wound. “I wonder whether it is anything very wicked?”

“Wicked? Not at all. It is not very wise,

that is all," said Nigel, rather testily. He half suspected he was being laughed at, and that was a thing he was quick to resent, as your very matter-of-fact people, who specially plume themselves upon their common-sense, generally are. As the attitude of a true-bred Englishman to an outsider, social or other, so is theirs to such foreign entities as humour, irony, or imagination. It is not precisely a hostile attitude, but it is a suspicious one, expectant of friction.

When, however, Nigel stole a glance at Milly's face to see if she intended satire, he failed to detect any traces of unholy mirth. He saw only that the old sad look they had all three been trying so hard to banish had settled down on it again, and he blamed himself for having permitted even the slightest approach to "business."

"But we wont go into such deep questions now," he added, with what was intended for a cheerful laugh. "Depend upon it, if *you* go in for 'enthusiasm,' 'enthusiasm' must be all right. I know I envy the 'young persons' who will get the benefit of it."

The sadness deepened upon Milly's face, but she only said, almost as cheerfully as he, "Suppose we think about getting to the top? Bob and Lina are out of sight."

“Must we hurry?” said Nigel. “You know the view will get clearer the longer we wait.”

But Milly was already on her feet. And a very charming figure she made, as Nigel viewed her, still from his recumbent posture, standing erect among the fern and heather, in her well-fitting black serge walking-dress and pretty hat. Mourning suited Milly. It set off her beautiful colouring, and gave her a girlish look, which heightened the sweet pathos of her expression. She wore one rose, which some one had stolen from the wall of the Ship Inn, at Porlock, where they were staying. She carried only a stout walking-stick, purchased at a delightful emporium, where your head touched the ceiling, and you could get anything and everything, from excellent photographs to pocket handkerchiefs, adorned with prints of Æsop’s fables.

“I shall get there first!” said Milly, turning her back on her swain, and continuing her tramp up the steep hill-side. Needless to say that Nigel was not long in overtaking her, and insisting on dragging her up by means of her walking-stick and his own. So they tramped on till they reached the nearly level ridge close to the summit, and were nearing the rough cairn that crowns the highest point on Exmoor.

It was then that Milly stopped short with an exclamation of surprise.

“Why, there are some people there already!” she said. “And do you see some ponies? And they all seem to be talking together. Bob isn’t waving to us.”

And the nearer they got, the more obvious it appeared that Bob and Lina had forgotten all about the stragglers, and were entirely absorbed in their new friends, a middle-aged gentleman with a field-glass, and a young lady in a riding-habit, whose tired ponies waited with drooping heads hard by.

Now “aggravation in a cart,” as said the immortal Doctor Marigold, “is aggravation,” and, if we may parody the saying, unsociability on a cairn is unsociability with a vengeance. In the first place, as in the case of the cart, space is very limited; in the next place, if you arrive first, it is almost impossible to avoid holding out a helping hand to any stranger who comes up after you. The large loose stones yield a very uncertain foothold, especially to inexperienced climbers; and when you hear them clattering behind you, it is not the least use pretending to be absorbed in the view. Again, the people who have glasses feel bound, in courtesy, to offer them to the people who

have not. Then the sense of a common achievement completed, especially if the day be hot, and the effort expended great, gives a certain fellow-feeling, even in Britain; and it may be that the grandeur and extent of the scene and surroundings tend to lessen exclusiveness and expand the more genial instincts. It was not really surprising that Bob and Lina should have become all of a sudden so "thick" with a pair of strangers on the top of Dunkery.

But what did astonish the other two was Bob getting up, as quickly as you can get up on a cairn, and performing an introduction as he helped Milly to ascend.

"We have found some friends, Milly. Mr. Lennard has come down unexpectedly. Miss Lennard—my sister—Mr. Maurice."

"I am very happy to make your acquaintance," said no less a person than Bob's Gamaliel, James Lennard, Q.C., in his turn helping Milly to some sort of a seat on one of the bigger stones. "I have often heard of you from your brother."

Mr. Lennard spoke rather slowly and very deferentially, and there was just a tinge of "old-fashioned" politeness in his voice and manner. He spoke extremely kindly, too; and Milly looked up into his face to see who it should be that cared to "make her acquaint-

ance," and seemed so anxious to keep her from slipping. She beheld a man of fifty, or perhaps more, erect and well-built, though a little inclined to stoutness, with a singularly fine head and face, and a smoothness of complexion that belied his years. His eyes had the look—keen, yet calm,—which is only acquired by men who have mixed largely with men, and not by them unless they have love as well as learning, and the heritage of sympathy as well as the accident of experience. Milly soon dropped her own beneath his fixed, his almost solicitous gaze. She felt herself colouring, she could not imagine why. She had never known before that a stranger's eyes could magnetize. A quick wave of consciousness, part pleasure, part uneasiness, part wonder, thrilled her, as it had been a sudden sound.

If you give a skilled musician a sheet of music that is new to him, he will not need an instrument and an hour's study to gauge its merits. He will cast his eye over the page, and before he has spoken, you will see by his face that he thinks little of it, or else, it may be, that the melody has gone to his soul.

Milly was being read as swiftly and as deftly by this stranger, and, without knowing it, she felt it.

IV.

YOU can see fifteen counties on a good day from Dunkery Beacon. The little party lingered there till the evening drew on, and the atmosphere became clear as heart could wish. There was much to see and there was much to say. Mr. Lennard knew every inch of the vast sweep of country they were looking on, and could tell the exact distances from point to point. He came of a west-country family, and year after year he returned to the haunts that he loved, till they were more familiar than the purlieus of the law in London. And it was long before they all grew tired of gazing on the purple ranges of Exmoor, of Dartmoor, of the Quantocks—even of distant Blackdown, crowned with the just visible Wellington monument—or, turning northwards, on the shining “Severn sea” and the white coast-line of Wales.

At length some one suggested that if they stayed much longer it would be dark before they got back to Porlock. It turned out that Mr. Lennard and his niece were staying at Porlock Weir, so that they could all return together.

“And you and I, Amy, can share our ponies with our friends,” said James Lennard. “Miss Dasent looks a little tired.”

“Will you ride now?” said Amy Lennard, a small dark girl of seventeen. And Milly, who was in truth very tired, suffered herself to be lifted on to the rough Exmoor pony by no less a person than the Q.C. For Bob demurred, saying something about “Miss Lennard walking in a habit,” and so forth; and Nigel did not like to seem too forward in robbing the young lady of her pony. But Miss Lennard ran on ahead with Lina, who never stood still out of doors when folk were arguing, and so Mr. Lennard got his way. Again Milly looked at him in surprise, as he helped her up, arranged the waterproof that did duty for habit, and contrived in two seconds to make her as comfortable as if she had been prepared for riding. How did he manage it? How clever and kind he was! She was amused at the quiet way in which he had carried his point. She had a curious, sweet sense of being taken in hand by this man, who was old enough to be her father, and tender enough to be her father too. She had had no father she could remember, only the old uncle who had loved her hardly, as some children are loved—bountifully—and, as he thought, kindly,

but hardly. And once more Milly turned away her eyes as her new friend said very deliberately, "You look pale. I think a little cold tea would do you good."

Milly laughed, and said she feared she would have to wait for some hot tea at the Ship.

"Oh, I have some," said Mr. Lennard. "I always carry it about with me."

"Oh, thank you, I really am not so very——" began Milly, who felt she was giving an unpardonable amount of trouble. But he strode off—he had rather a long, quick stride—to a certain package which was fastened to his saddle, and she perceived that remonstrance would be useless.

"How like Lennard!" said Bob, in an amused whisper. "I know that's one of his fads. He always drinks cold tea, in hotels and everywhere, for fear of the water. I don't believe he'd touch a drop even from one of these streams."

"I don't believe he's such a fool," said Milly, in such a remarkably and unexpectedly emphatic tone that Bob and Nigel both stared. No one had heard Milly say anything so decisive for years.

"Oh, he's quite gone on Hygiène," said Bob, with the calm superiority of superb ignorance and an unimpeachable digestion. "He belongs to Health Societies and things. He often says if he'd had his choice he'd have been a doctor."

“Then it’s odd he should have done so well at the Bar,” said Nigel.

“A clever man will succeed in anything,” said Milly, sententiously.

Nigel did not quite like this stubborn advocacy of a stranger; for he was a stranger to Milly. Besides, eminent men have their weak points. Lennard was well known to have several very ridiculous crotchets, some connected with the health movement, and others with—save the mark!—women’s rights. So Nigel made no rejoinder, but went rather sulkily to the pony’s head, resolving that no one else should have the privilege of showing that veteran his way down from Dunkery.

Milly thought that never before had she known tea, cold or hot, to be possessed of such restorative properties, as this tea that the Q.C. gave her, with two little crisp biscuits of a sort he particularly affected. She had felt a good deal exhausted. The talk with Nigel had agitated her—Milly was so easily agitated now—and it was the old mental weariness as much as bodily fatigue that had made her look so pale. And now, in a few moments, almost before they set off, she felt so refreshed, so well, so happy! As Nigel led the pony off at a quick walk, she turned round to her new friend with the sweet

gracious smile that was natural to her, though now so seldom seen, that frank expansive smile of childhood which some women keep all their lives long, and said, "That tea was most delicious!" She would have said something more, only Nigel and the pony would go at such a pace, and Mr. Lennard, whose pony was slower, and was at that moment making a short cut of its own through a patch of heather, was almost out of earshot already.

"Your sister is not looking at all strong," said the great man to his young friend, who kept beside him.

Bob assured him that Milly was a great deal stronger than she had been; that, in point of fact, she was quite well.

"I suppose she had a stiff time of it with old Fenning," resumed James Lennard musingly. "I remember him well—well—in the old days at Tiverton, when my father was living. You know my father was in the company's service, too, and that was how it was he and your uncle were friends. But we boys were horribly afraid of him. He was a stern man—a very stern man."

"Yes; I think Milly did pay dearly for her fortune," said Bob.

"She does not look to me like the kind of

person who could live with old Fenning," said Mr. Lennard. "Too nervous, too sensitive. What will she do now?" he added, rather abruptly, after a pause.

"Marry, I hope," said Bob.

"Ah!" said the Q.C., glancing at Nigel Maurice.

"Milly is a queer girl," went on Bob. "She seems rather averse to matrimony. Now and then, when she has been at Wimbledon, we have had nice fellows to meet her, but she wouldn't have anything to say to them."

"Indeed! that's strange," mused Mr. Lennard. The subject seemed to interest him, and he kept Dasent to it. "Now, I shouldn't have thought that. I shouldn't have thought that. What does she care about now?"

"Well, you would sympathize," said Bob, smiling. "She has taken up the woman question. I don't mean shrieking on platforms, you know; but she wants to go and live in the East End, to work among the—women there."

Mr. Lennard smiled in his turn. Bob had quite forgotten that his own sister, who was married to a member of Parliament, was one of the women who "shrieked on platforms." It was from her serene intelligence, her patient heroism, her large tenderness of soul, that he

had learned the noblest lessons of his life. He proceeded to draw out Bob on the subject of Milly's mission.

"Yes," wound up Bob, at the close of a long account of Milly's futile aspiration, and Captain Fenning's determined opposition, "I may say this is the only thing I have known Milly really put her heart into, except—— Oh, look! what a splendid view!"

"Very fine. Except ——?" said the Q.C.

"Well, you know—our Guy—the boy we lost in scarlet fever," said young Dasent, lowering his voice a little. He had not meant to be betrayed into speaking of that loss. If he even thought of it, it was as though a shroud descended upon the brightness of the earth and the joy of the land were gone. But he must go on now. "Milly was awfully devoted to him. You never saw anything like it. They were like a pair of friends. They understood each other. I thought she would have died when—when——"

Then James Lennard saw that it was time to change the subject, and he asked Bob how much work he had got through in the Vacation. But in his mind there was the image of a beautiful boy he had seen at Wimbledon once, lithe, active, large-eyed, fearless from having

been so much loved, but unspoilable from native sweetness and manliness of temper. He had thought at the time that the death of that only child was one of the most tragic things he had known. It was true, that it went hard with Milly when the boy died. He had been born at the Croft, where Bob and Lina remained for some months afterwards, and his big brown eyes then and there inspired Milly with what had been hitherto the one passion of her life.

“The simplest affections, such as maternal love, can any flatter themselves that they have known them in their fulness if they have been unmingled with enthusiasm?” So said Madame de Staël.

Milly put enthusiasm into her love for Guy. She rejoiced over him so, and she mourned for him so, that Lina herself would wonder, and it would have been hard to say which was most his mother.

V.

It would be difficult to imagine a cosier party than the one which assembled that evening in the little parlour of the Ship. The Ship just holds four people comfortably.

The parlour has to serve for dining-room and drawing-room both, but that is of little consequence when the attendance is brisk and good. The snowy tablecloth is soon cleared and the table ready for writing-cases, books, or games. To-night our quartet were playing whist. A bright wood fire threw cheerful gleams upon the walls; fires were very acceptable now after sunset. The days were perfect—fresh, and crisp, and sunny; the evenings were perfect too, for there is always something anomalous in having to draw the curtains and sit round the table without feeling chilly enough to light the fire.

“What are we waiting for?” Milly was asking absently, after a pause of a few seconds.

“Oh, don’t mention it. The person on the left of the dealer usually leads, that’s all,” said Bob. “But when that person has already revoked, trumped her partner’s ace, and declined to return trumps, one ceases to be too exacting.”

“I’m very stupid,” said Milly. But somehow she did not pronounce the oft-repeated formula in her usual neutral, mechanical way. She started a little, and flushed a good deal, and seemed ashamed of her wandering mind, as well as apologetic for it.

The pitiless Bob detected her, and asked her what she was thinking about. He had made up his own mind that it was some stolen words of Nigel's on the hill-side or in the woods; possibly, he had even proposed, and Milly was wondering if she had known him long enough to say "Yes." But he could not exactly tease her about that, so he substituted another person who had been very attentive to Milly that day.

"Queen against you, Milly. I know what it is. It's the cold tea and biscuits. It really is very unbecoming in you, to flirt with elderly widowers in that way, Millicent. How came it *we* got no cold tea offered *us*?"

"How foolish you are!" said Milly, the flush deepening on her face. "You confuse me. Were spades led, or clubs?"

"You mean, has he been married, and if so, how often?" said her tormentor. "Only once, my dear; but they say he'll never marry again, so banish that cold tea from your mind if you can, and attend to the game."

"Lennard has two or three sons, hasn't he?" asked Nigel, by way of diversion, as he fancied Milly did not altogether enjoy this *badinage*.

"Too old to be your stepsons, Milly," said the irrepressible Bob. "One of them is down here with him now for the stag-hunting—he must

be four or five and twenty; and the other, the artist, was to arrive this evening."

"Whist is a game played in silence by four persons," interrupted Lina, sententiously. "Draw your card, partner."

Her husband obeyed, but before the trick was complete, there came a tap at the door. A gentleman wished to speak to Mr. Dasent.

"Ask him to come in," said Bob. "But really, Milly, you might have waited till to-morrow. I suppose you forgot that the game of whist cannot be played by *five* persons."

"*I* never asked Mr. Lennard!" said poor Milly, dismayed. But she looked towards the door with a most strong, unaccountable hope that the "gentleman" in question might be he.

It proved to be his second son, the artist, a boyish-looking fellow of two and twenty, with curls and a bright, eager face. He was a stranger to all but Bob. He had come with a message from his father, he said. Long walk? Oh, he loved walking at night! It was starlight, and the outline of the hills was like a vision, like a dream. His father had changed his mind about to-morrow. He was not going to spend the whole day with him in the Horner Woods, sketching. He would like to go to the meet at Cloutsham, as Mr. Dasent had proposed

doing, and picnic there, and perhaps they could stroll home through the Horner Valley afterwards. He had chartered a waggonette, and hoped they would all do him the honour to drive to the meet with him.

“And if you walk home, you’ll be sure to run across me,” added the boy. “I’m going to do a lovely bit I found last year, close to the water. A silver-birch, half-uprooted and leaning across a group of boulders covered with the divinest mosses. I think you will say there is no sweeter gem on Exmoor.”

“What an enthusiast!” said Nigel Maurice, as the door closed upon young Lennard, when all arrangements for the combined picnic were completed.

Milly turned her large, questioning eyes upon him, and noted the indulgent smile of superior sense upon his face.

“He is an enthusiast, and I am an enthusiast,” she thought, “and in that capacity, a man of the world would despise us both. *I wonder if his father despises him?*”

“And to think that boy might be mounted if he chose, like his brother, and galloping over Exmoor with the stag hounds, instead of stifling in a valley with his nose glued to an easel. Heigh-ho!” and Nigel gave a mighty sigh.

“For my own part, I can hardly stand going to Cloutsham on wheels to-morrow. What do you say, Bob?”

“Oh, I couldn’t leave Milly,” said Bob, gravely, “even if I hadn’t forgotten how to ride. Things are growing serious.”

“I think the young man shows his good sense,” said Lina. “He means to succeed in his art. Why do you want *every* man to spend his life tearing about on horseback, tormenting dumb animals? I have a great mind to go sketching with him myself, for the sake of a few hours’ sympathy and peace of mind.”

“It is very good of his father to let him be an artist,” said Milly, musingly. She was beginning to think that his father could not despise him very much. Possibly he even sympathized with him, and gave to his young wayward, passionate heart the patience and the tolerance, and the scope it needed.

“Oh, Lennard has often told me he lets them all three follow their natural bent,” said Bob, serious at last. “Ernest cares for nothing but sport, so he allows him enough to keep a couple of hunters, and, I believe, takes a shooting for him every year as well. Lennard has made a large fortune, as you know, so he’ll never have his own bread to get. Then this fellow Philip

seems to have enough to starve on, judging by his studio in South Kensington—which is quite close to his father's, by the way—and his foreign tours——”

“And what about the youngest, Claud, isn't it?” asked Lina.

“Claud is at Oxford, with strong leanings to Ritualism,” said Bob. “I don't fancy anything could be more opposed to Lennard's own mind; but I know he is quite prepared to supplement his curate's stipend with a handsome allowance. He says Claud would pawn his clothes to give to the poor if he didn't, and if the lad must pinch, he would rather it were from asceticism than from necessity.”

“What an ideal father!” said Nigel, sarcastically, as he lit the ladies' candles for them. “Mine would quote Proverbs to him. But, then, he is essentially the ‘old school.’ Catch him indulging any of us like that! Now, by the look of him, I should have said Lennard was the same. But you never can tell.”

“I think the young gentlemen stand a good chance of being spoiled,” said Bob. “But they are all three devoted to their father, which isn't always the case with spoiled children. I believe any one of them would die for him at a moment's notice.”

By that time Lina and Milly had nearly climbed the narrow staircase, and the two gentlemen were making for a small adjoining room, where they were permitted to smoke.

It was, as Philip Lennard had said, a lovely, starlight night. Milly found her little window wide open, and when she had closed the door she went and leaned out of it, well muffled in a shawl, and let the cool night wind beat on her cheeks, and blow her hair about for a good half-hour or more. The little village lay silent before her. Here and there a light twinkled in a low casement window; now and then a passing footstep fell, or a dog yelped in the distance, or a buzz of voices rose from some inn-parlour in the main street; then it seemed that all had sunk to sleep, and only the flowers, clustering richly in the favoured cottage gardens, were waking and feeding the night with their sweetness. Once, when a sudden puff of wind came, Milly felt something touch her face, and started back. But it was only a long waving arm of the Gloire de Dijon rose, that covered the whitewashed wall and even part of the thatched roof with glossy leaves and blossoms manifold. Milly could have gathered several by merely putting out her hand, but to-night she only played with one great bud on that vagrant

spray, laying it herself against her cheek, which was not less delicate and smooth and fine.

So there were fathers like that in the world ! So there were men who knew the world's sorrows, and would not let them press sooner than might be on their children ; who did not add to them by repressing harmless instincts ; who did not thwart, deny, suppress till it was too late—too late. There were fathers who were great, learned, far-famed, wise, and yet so very tender ; and there were sons who could love a father so.

“How *I* could have loved you, if you had been my father !” Milly said aloud, as she watched the stars shining over Porlock Weir.

VI.

QUITE early the next morning, a rather dilapidated but roomy waggonette drew up at the door of the Ship, and Mr. Lennard and his niece got out, and said they had a hamper of provisions, and Mrs. Dasent need not trouble herself to have anything packed.

“This is very luxurious,” said Lina, as she climbed the creaky steps, like the sylph she was. “We had only thought of walking, with sandwiches in Bob’s knapsack.”

“Ah, that walking may be overdone, even in air and weather like this,” said Mr. Lennard. “You ladies both look a little tired this morning. Have you wraps? You’ll find it fresh driving.”

Yes; the ladies had wraps, they said. But Mr. Lennard was evidently not satisfied with flimsy things. He quietly got out of the wagonette again and went indoors to Bob, who was always the last, and presently they both came out laden with rugs, shawls, and water-proofs enough to fit out an Arctic expedition. Lina would not put anything on; but Milly’s feebleness was not listened to, and she found herself enveloped in a plaid before she quite realized who it was that was putting it so authoritatively and so deftly on her shoulders.

Then they drove off through the lovely little village, with its gabled, thatched cottages, its tall geraniums, and myrtle, and roses, and purple clematis; and on into the lanes, where the sunshine sparkled on broad patches of dew and rich clusters of reddening bramble and fern. And now and then there were bits where no sunshine could penetrate through the arched tree-boughs overhead, and then Milly hugged her plaid with a grateful sense of warmth, and drank in the freshness without feeling the chill of the air.

And she stole little grateful glances at her neighbour, the Q.C., to whom she felt that she owed this sense of comfort, and more than half of the buoyant happiness of this glorious autumn morning; and she answered little Amy's prattle very kindly, of course—Milly was always kind—but very briefly, for she was listening to what Mr. Lennard was saying to Bob and Nigel.

When a woman is not strong, when her health has been undermined and her spirit much oppressed, such little marks of more than common courtesy and consideration carry an almost undue weight. There is not much capacity for intellectual effort; the brain is weary; nothing seems real but a vast negation, and nothing worth while save to rest. And, then, if one draws near who seems to understand that without specific disease, life can weigh heavily upon the tired frame; who knows something of the wondrous mechanism which has been untuned by misery, and lays the stress of one who knows upon its well-being, his presence will bring strange relief and comfort. He may have mental stores also, but that which helps, revives, and soothes is his sympathy with our physical needs, and the great attention he bestows on what we are accustomed to call little things.

Mr. Lennard's conversation with the other two gentlemen had arisen out of some stray, feminine remark of Lina's anent the cruelty of sport. But Lina was taking no part in it now. The men were beyond her depth. She was only listening with round eyes, and as grave a look as her sunny face could wear.

"Depend upon it, there is a great deal more in that *tu quoque* of the vivisectionists than is generally admitted," said the Q.C. "For my own part, I don't believe the sensations of a hunted stag are much more pleasurable than those of a dog in a physiological laboratory. But hear the opinion of a cultivated English gentleman, who probably, as the saying goes, 'would not have hurt a fly' — I mean," added Mr. Lennard, with a quiet smile, "when he was not in the saddle or carrying a gun. The passage struck me. I learned it off by heart. '*His . . . eye seems fuller than in repose, but brightened by a consciousness of intelligence, rather than by the tension of anxiety or distress. . . . To be hunted is but a generous rivalry that tests the powers in which his spirit takes pride, that wages his own endurance and sagacity against the hostile instinct of his natural enemy, the hound.*' Those are also the opinions of my son Ernest. It is a comfortable doctrine, but I am afraid while it

holds so extensively the anti-vivisectionists will not make much way."

"And a good thing too," said Nigel Maurice. He did not see a kind of spasm pass over Milly as he spoke. "Those people are so extreme! They would hamper science and bring human progress to a standstill for the sake of a sentimental crotchet. Of course, no one advocates wanton cruelty; but what are the sufferings of any number of dogs and rabbits compared with human life?"

"I am clear about one thing," said Dasent, "and that is, that there should be no *further* restrictions placed upon research in this country. No doubt some check was needed, but unfortunately where it is most required, namely, on the Continent, it is not at all likely to be supplied. It seems vexatious that the most humane people, as I suppose we are, on the whole, should be the only one to have its hands tied; and I have the greatest faith in our doctors."

Still the Q.C. was smiling quietly. Then he astonished everybody, and most of all his neighbour, Milly, by turning round to her, and saying, very deliberately, "And what is *your* opinion?"

Milly felt her colour changing under his scrutiny, and, startled and confused as she was,

stammered something about not having made up her mind.

“Ah,” said Mr. Lennard, “I am glad to hear you say that; for I do not think we have heard the *dernier mot* of either side as yet. But I am inclined to believe,” he added, addressing himself only to Milly, which he could do the more easily that the others had begun to talk among themselves, “that the practice of vivisection will stand or fall with many other things, with some forms of food, for example, with certain elements of dress and furniture, and, of course, with sport.”

“I think so, too,” said Milly, very earnestly; for she had gained confidence now, and did not fear to meet his eyes.

“Yes, you think so,” he repeated; and he paused while he looked at her. “You think so, but you do not say so. You would not be understood.”

She smiled.

“And you *hope*,” he went on—as though he were reading her soul in her frank and trustful eyes, and had found in it depths worth sounding, and a rare crystalline beauty—“you hope that it will fall.”

Then they emerged from the lanes on to the open moor, and such a scene of wild, grand

beauty burst upon them as in all their pleasant rambles they had not yet beheld. On the left, miles of undulating gorse and heather; on the right, a wooded gorge, the bare hills beyond standing out in majestic outline against the clear pale blue sky. It was a place where the solitude was usually complete, save for some stray rider or pedestrian, or a farm waggon making its slow way to or from beautiful Cloutsham; but to-day there was quite a string of vehicles on the road, and a rumbling of wheels and a buzz of voices as far as you could see and hear.

Presently the procession plunged down into the wood and through the valley; and then came the stiff pull, still through the wood, but up the steep hill you have to climb in order to reach Cloutsham Farm. Here a large field was already assembled, awaiting, in perhaps the loveliest spot where fortunate sportsmen were ever invited to curb their impatience, the huntsman's signal. Ernest Lennard was talking to some ladies in a phaeton, but as soon as he saw the waggonette he left them, and rode up with a look of keen delight on his handsome face to his father. He seemed to have no eyes but for him. "I'm so glad you're come," he said, warmly, as he patted the glossy neck of

his beautiful hunter, and did all he could to quiet him. The look and the words were not lost upon Milly. "Isn't it lovely this morning? I never saw the view look so fine. I was so afraid you were not coming."

All this to his father, with a sort of overflowing expansiveness of affection which seemed to Milly the most beautiful thing she ever saw. When Ernest was introduced, she leaned over the side of the carriage to give him her hand.

"How happy he looks!" she said, in spite of herself to Mr. Lennard, when he had gone round to speak to Lina.

"I like them to be happy," said Mr. Lennard, simply.

"Happy!" repeated Nigel, who had caught the last word, and who thought that Milly and her neighbour had had quite enough *tête-à-tête* conversation during the drive. "I should think so, with such a mount, on such a morning. Look! there is Arthur with the hounds. Don't you think we ought to get out, to see them go down the hill?"

So a rush was made for the low wall of loose stones surrounding the field, from whence they could see the hunt defile through the gate and down into the valley, winding away through

the trees, till all had disappeared, save here and there some moving specks of pink and white and brown. Presently they emerged again, only to disappear again behind a hill; but as the little group stood straining their eyes after the last horseman, it seemed to them that somehow he did not vanish with the rest. On the contrary, he seemed to multiply, till, instead of a straggling man and horse, there was a small stationary mass of black, ant-like figures, swarming round the spot where they had seen him last. Even with the help of Mr. Lennard's field-glass, it was difficult to make out the cause of this phenomenon. An accident it could scarcely be, on that gentle slope, where the going was almost as easy as on a newly mown lawn. Yet the small black mass stirred not. At the end of twenty minutes Bob said he could stand it no longer; he must go and see what it meant. But at that moment a breathless rustic was seen making his way to the gate, throwing his arms about wildly, and far too excited to answer questions coherently.

"Cheer; I'm goin' for a cheer!" he cried, in broad Somerset, as he tumbled through the field to the farm. "He can't walk! I've got to get a cheer! He's dead! He's dead."

"It must be something serious," said Mr.

Lennard. "Shall we go and see if there is anything we can do?"

Bob eagerly assented, and the two instantly set off together at a swinging pace down the hill. If anything, James Lennard's step was quicker and firmer than that of the younger man. Nigel Maurice had elected to stay with the ladies, and promised to choose a place for the picnic and have the hamper unpacked. But for a few minutes no one seemed disposed to do anything but stand listlessly watching the group on the hill, with a sense of anxiety and awe, and the chill of a sudden cloud.

Presently another messenger appeared, a farmer, on a rough pony. He brought better news. It was the horse that was dead, he said. He seemed to have got heart disease, and to have dropped down dead in a moment—some over-ridden screw from Dulverton, he fancied. The gentleman had broken something, he didn't know what; but he wanted to walk home, and wouldn't let any one touch him, or try to lift him. He was a queer one. He, the farmer, was on his way to Porlock, to fetch the doctor.

After that the sunshine came back into Lina's eyes, and she proposed to Amy Lennard, who, she saw, carried a drawing-block, to go and sketch the farm-house, while the other two

looked out a place for luncheon. Lina had noticed a tendency to sulkiness on Nigel's part, and hoped by this manœuvre to smooth away any little misunderstanding that might have arisen between him and Milly.

"Do you see a clump of trees down there to the left?" said this crafty person, indicating a retired nook in almost the same direction as that taken by the hunt. "That seems to me the sort of place. We needn't be particular about being near the water to-day," added Lina, with a mischievous twinkle, "as I am quite sure there will be plenty of cold tea in Mr. Lennard's hamper."

"Oh yes, I know there's plenty!" said the dark-eyed niece, gravely. "And milk and materials for lemon squash."

"Mr. Lennard has the courage of his convictions," said Nigel, satirically, wondering how it could be that a "clever man like Lennard" should push his "crotchets" so far as to omit the sherry-flask and a bottle or two of Bass.

VII.

It took a long time to fix upon a spot exactly suitable for luncheon. It was chilly where the shade was too thick, and the sun dazzled and even scorched you in the open. There must be roots, or logs, or boulders to sit on, and there must be, if possible, a carpet of moss for the feet. Nigel and Milly wandered on and on till they had got far away into the valley. It did not occur to them what a long way the hamper would have to be carried.

Nigel was thinking of something very different. He was making up his mind to speak to Milly that very day. He had previously resolved not to hurry matters, but there had been a something in Milly's manner the last day or two which had caused him a vague uneasiness, and decided him against further delay. He could not have defined the change in her, and he was not conscious of anything tangible having come between him and his prize (any jealousy of a grey-haired widower with grown-up children was too absurd an idea to be entertained for a moment). Still he felt her further from him every hour, instead of nearer, and at the same time she grew better

and brighter and happier every hour. Nigel knew very well, for all his excellent opinion of himself, that it was not his attentions that had made her so. She was always kind and courteous to him, sometimes even affectionately grateful when he put himself out for her; but whenever he said anything especially pointed, she always seemed to be especially absent, and began talking about her money affairs or her collection for the Working Girls' Homes. She was a beautiful woman, Nigel thought—so very feminine and gentle and docile; but she did not seem to have much "romance" (that was the way Nigel put it) in her composition. He could have even found it in his heart to forgive a little more coquetry in her. He liked a woman to show rather more consciousness in one form or another that she was being made love to, and not say irrelevant things and look like an exquisite statue—except for this mysterious new light that had come into her eyes.

"Miss Dasent," he began abruptly, at a moment when she seemed more absent than ever—when she was, in truth, listening in dreamy silence to the inward voices that prophesied to her of joy—"you always seem to me to be living in the past, or else in the future. The present is nothing to you. I don't think

you know now where you are, or who is with you, or what month it is, or whether it is hot or cold. You live in a dream. A little while ago it seemed a bad dream, but I think it is a pleasant one now. But, do you know, I should like to wake you up. I should like to be the hero in the story of the Sleeping Beauty, and bring you back to real life. I should like—but, before I go on, you must tell me whether you think me horribly impertinent.”

“Oh no,” said Milly, calmly, digging at the moss that surrounded the gnarled root she was sitting on with her walking-stick. “It is quite true, I have not been myself for a very long time. It is a very odd feeling. I often feel as if I were an actor in a play, going through my part in my sleep, as you say; or else I feel like one of the audience looking on at a dull performance where nothing is real, and yet you have to join in the make-believe for fear of doing wrong, and try to laugh and cry in the right place.”

“And yet,” said Nigel, with the touch of impatience he always felt at Milly’s singularities heightened by her obtuseness to his love-making—“and yet there was a time when you joined in everything, as if life was real enough. I have often heard Eob and Mrs. Bob

say so. And it was not so very long ago. And I do hope it won't be long before it is so again."

"I dare say not. And yet, at my age——" said Milly, vaguely.

Nigel looked up at the fresh, infantine face, with all its earnest purpose of heart concealed behind a mask of pink-and-white neutral girlishness, and fairly burst out laughing.

"You are very original," he said. "Do you know that Lennard asked Bob whether you were twenty?"

"It isn't what one *looks*," said Milly, with a sudden flush, which Nigel attributed to the highly personal character of the conversation. "You know I have had a good deal to go through. There are things that don't seem much to lookers-on that get into your system like a slow poison and age you mentally."

"Good gracious!" said Nigel.

"You see, you will make me talk about myself," said Milly, smiling; "so you must be told the truth. I am not exaggerating. You know what we were talking about just now—*curari*, the stuff the vivisectionists give animals to deaden—not the suffering, but the power to express that they suffer? Well, you know," added Milly, still with her inscrutable smile, "you get to feel something like a curarized dog

when you are not allowed to *be yourself*; when the days go by, and the months and the years, and you may not say what you want to say, and do what you want to do, and love what you want to love—when you must not even show that you suffer. It paralyzes the faculties and makes you bad company, as I am. Shall we go back to Lina? I think this place will do very well for luncheon.”

“Stay one moment,” said Nigel, drawing a little nearer to her, and looking up into the calm face that perplexed almost as much as it attracted him. “There was something I wanted to say to you. I am very sorry for you, indeed I am. I know you must have had a terribly trying time; and being shut up so much alone with poor old Captain Fenning was very bad for you, and of course things got on to your nerves, and made you feel as you describe.”

There Nigel paused a moment. He wished to sympathize even in her “morbid” feelings as much as possible, but while he spoke he could not get rid of an unpleasant sense that his language sounded more like that of a person anxious to humour a child than anything else. And Milly *had* used such ridiculously strong expressions in describing her sensations, that he felt he had some excuse. “*Slow poison get-*

ting into your system," "curarized dog," "trouble ageing you mentally and paralyzing the faculties."

What expressions for a tedious sick-nursing, and drudgery for an eccentric old man, and a few difficulties in the way of a benevolent "fad!"

"But believe me," went on Nigel, "all that is over now. You are free to—to lead your own life now; and what your friends wish is, that it should be a very happy *natural* one——"

"Natural!" interrupted Milly, speaking more quickly than usual. "But, you see, what is *natural* to me seems unnatural to my friends,—that's the worst of it. What they think natural is that I should divide my time between Wimbledon and the Croft, perhaps taking my cousins, Captain and Mrs. Hamilton, to live with me there, and do nothing but ride about, and read, and work, and go to balls. Now to me that kind of life is *unnatural*. There seems to me to be so much to be *done* in the world. There are the thousands and thousands of people that want helping and *raising* and loving. There are all the little children that want saving from——"

"Milly stopped, and shuddered. As she went on, the tones of her voice deepened, and her eyes were so inspired that for a moment—even to Nigel—the green forest nook where

he sat at her feet seemed as the gate of heaven, a temple sanctified to all things pure and holy.

"There are the demons of drink and of vice to be combated at whatever cost to our own tastes and prejudices. There are better homes, and better air and better recreations to be got for the people. There are the poor animals, who cannot speak to tell us of their sufferings, and whom, it seems to me, that everything manly and womanly in our natures *must* rise up to defend."

"You are too good for earth," Nigel murmured, taking her hand and kissing it. "I am afraid it will be a long time before people in general see things as you do. If they did, there's no doubt the world would be a better place—though how we poor lawyers should get on in it," he added, unable to resist a joke at the expense of Milly's "unpractical" schemes, "is another matter. I am afraid you would banish us from your Utopia. But what I meant by a *natural* life," he went on, growing grave again, and lowering his voice to a significant murmur, "was not quite the life you describe. I was thinking of the life most women like—don't they?—not spent alone, or even among friends, rich and poor, but with *one person* always at their side to care for them, and protect them, and devote himself to their

interests, and see"—here Nigel smiled—"that they don't ruin themselves with generosity and benevolence. Oh, don't go," he pleaded; for Milly had risen without a word—not rising himself, and venturing to take her hand again, in order to detain her. "Tell me one thing, just one thing before we go back. If one promised to be very indulgent and very sympathizing, not to be an obstacle to anything—not to anything—but to help, to be a help in every possible way——"

"I see Bob and Mr. Lennard coming," said Milly, calmly, anxious not to show the relief she felt.

Before she espied them, one of them, at least, the quicker-eyed of the two had seen her, standing under the old ash, on whose roots she had been resting, with her swain beside her. And Mr. Lennard, whose eyes seldom played him false, knew he was not mistaken in thinking that when he first caught sight of them they were hand in hand.

"So things are coming to a climax," he thought. "It is a pity. She is too good for him."

James Lennard had a way of his own of looking at things. Young Maurice was amiable and gentleman-like. His great-grandfather had

received a baronetcy in return for political services of some note, and his family had been established in one of the midland counties for centuries. He had fair abilities, and excellent prospects, and he had always borne a good character. The face James Lennard had seen turned so eagerly to Milly's was, though not expressive, handsome and pleasing. The eyes, if a little cold, were large and intelligent; the features were regular, the mouth being especially firm and good. Few women but would have looked with favour on such a suitor, and that even Milly could be "too good" for him was a thought that had not occurred to any of Milly's friends before. And here was this stranger—for stranger he was to Milly, though not to her family—saying to himself, after an acquaintance of two days, with no hesitation at all, "It is a pity. She is too good for him."

VIII.

"Yes; I was taken for a doctor this morning. Lord Porlock, whom I knew very well as a young fellow, but who had forgotten me, came up very politely and said, 'I think you are a medical man?' I was rather pleased. I

thought I had barrister stamped on every line of my face."

"And you don't wish to be taken for a barrister?"

"I don't wish to be first a barrister, and after that a man. I had rather be first a man, and after that a professional man. But, you see, I have not quite got rid of the professional air, according to his lordship. I look *something*, that is clear."

"Yours must be a deeply interesting profession," said Milly. "It must bring you in contact with so many minds. You must know the human heart so well."

"I was forced into it," said the Q.C., "at the time of life when, unless we are exceptionally headstrong, like my boys"—here he smiled—"we allow others to choose our career for us. It is, as you say, deeply interesting—deeply, painfully interesting."

"Yet you would not choose it?"

"I would rather have been a doctor. You know Hygiène is one of my hobbies. And, then, it seems to me easier in these times to steer a straight course in the career of a healer than any other. In my own I have often been placed in circumstances of great ethical difficulty, and I fear that I may have in some

degree owed my success to acknowledging the professional, instead of the higher, standard of morality."

Gravely and simply, like a little child, he spoke to her, as they threaded their way through the Horner Woods, beautified here and there by the slant rays of the afternoon sun. Gravely and earnestly, like a little child she listened, interested as she had never been before in any human being.

"I found out too late how much there was that would go against one's higher self; but I persevered, trying to do my duty. I knew that in all the professions men have to strive against special faults; that if the lawyer is in danger of casuistry, the merchant is in danger of dishonesty and greed; the politician of time-serving; the parson of cant—even the doctor of the manufacture of cases, and the practising upon lay credulity. When we revise our litany," he added, smiling, "I thing of suggesting a fresh clause, entreating to be delivered

'From professional sins.'"

"I am told—I believe," began Milly, timidly, "that you have done a great deal of good."

"Ah, I am occupied now with what I believe would interest *you*," he returned, quickly.

"After giving some of the best years of my life to dry subjects like patents, and so forth,"—succeeding, he might have added, as only a man of great ability and greater resolution could have done in a field of labour uncongenial to him—"I am turning to graver questions in my old age. I have a sister who has of late directed my thoughts a good deal to the laws more especially affecting women. Just now I am working at some of these."

"I am very glad," said Milly.

She did not know how to express her gladness—her thankfulness that there were such men in a world that had begun to seem spell-bound in repression and wrong. And her thankfulness to have known him, to have had one walk—if but one—through the happy autumn woods, with so pure and high and absolutely true a soul!

For him, he thought that he was talking to Nigel Maurice's betrothed. He wondered that the young man had hastened on with his niece Amy and the Dasents, leaving him to stroll leisurely, absorbed in talk, with Milly. He thought that probably it might be the first and last walk he should have with her. He told himself with immense surprise, and even with a sort of pang he could not define, that he was

enjoying it too much. For long years, with the exception of his sister, he had not met with a woman so sweet and fair, who regarded so little her own charms, and lived so utterly in passionate hope of a happier world. He was leading her through a tangle of undergrowth, where two could not walk abreast, clearing her path for her of straggling bramble and fern, when he stopped suddenly.

“Are you not thirsty?” he said, catching at a cluster of huge blackberries ripe and juicy, which had escaped the notice of the other four, though they had lingered in that thicket. “Here is fruit worth eating; and one enjoys it after a long tramp like ours.”

He saw that she enjoyed it, and made a dive into the brambles for more. He stood and watched her quench her thirst with his spoils, and for a few minutes he kept silence.

“And now I must hurry you home,” something impelled him to say at last. “The air gets chilly now, in the evening, and we shall soon see the last of the sun. We must not let you take cold. What would—they all say?”

“But I am quite strong now,” said Milly, “and it is so beautiful here.”

Then a distant sound of merry voices was wafted up the valley. The vanguard had

lighted upon young Philip Lennard, busy painting his silver-birch and boulders. His cousin Amy was criticising impertinently. The boy had not stopped working, anxious to profit by the vanishing sunlight; but when his father approached he threw back his curls, worn long in approved Bohemian style—his hat had been discarded long since—and took him by the arm.

“Come here. I want you so much. Do you like it? Do you think it will do? Why were you so long? I was in two minds about that willow, but I thought I’d have a bit of it in the foreground. Would it have been better away, do you think?”

“No; I think you were right,” his father said, deliberately. For the moment, he, too, seemed to forget all else—even the strange, new interest that was absorbing him—for the boy and his picture.

“Oh, by the way, father, there was a letter from Claud after you left,” said Philip, whose brush was busy again. “He’s coming down to-day. We shall find him when we get back. I secured a room for him.”

“Claud!”

“Yes. He says he must have a day or two with you before going up next week.”

“Didn’t you say he had been working in the

East End all the Long?" put in Bob. "No wonder he wishes for a few days on Exmoor."

"Oh, it isn't for a holiday Claud comes," said Philip. "Trust him for that! His notion of a holiday is carting down Whitechapel in detachments of a few hundreds at a time to Epping Forest. Imagine the East End in July and August! But Claud doesn't get tired of *toujours* Whitechapel. He's merely coming down to see my father."

And then the conversation wandered away from Claud and his doings; but Philip's last words settled in Milly's heart.

As they all walked home together in the fading daylight, something seemed to quicken Milly's step, and, with a light, elastic tread like Lina's, her figure erect, her head carried proudly, she led the little procession along the narrow track to Porlock. Amy Lennard, chatting and laughing with her, came next; then, arm-in-arm, James Lennard and his son. Even Lina was tired to-day, and was lagging a little with Bob. Behind them, again, came Nigel, content with his own company, moody and ill-pleased with the results of the day's excursion. He had been a good deal put out by the interruption of his *tête-à-tête* with Milly in the forenoon; yet, on thinking things over, he began to see that it

was perhaps just as well that it had been interrupted. Milly had not behaved like a person who looked with favour on one's suit.

"Probably I was too precipitate," he thought. "I have not given her time enough. She is not a person who can stand being hurried about anything. Her ideas travel slowly. She hardly seemed to see what one meant. Better luck next time."

Thus Nigel comforted himself; but, all the same, he was not at ease. There was that in Milly's bearing that puzzled him increasingly, and completely failed to endorse a sanguine view of his future chances.

In front of the Ship there was a halt for "Goodnight."

"And Good-bye," said James Lennard, looking with great intentness and a sort of wistfulness into Milly's eyes, as he shook hands with her. "Or is there a chance of your coming on to Lynton, too?"

Milly's only answer was a slight start. She had not happened to hear that the Porlock Weir party were moving on the next day.

"It seems such a pity we should separate," said Bob, who had thoroughly enjoyed the society of his Gamaliel, and who knew better than the rest what it meant to be living in

intimate familiar intercourse with James Lennard, Q.C. Once he had said to them quite gravely, "I think you hardly know the position Lennard occupies. He is one of the leading men of the day. He puts you at ease in a moment, and then you forget what he really is." Now he said almost shyly, "I think we had better *all* go on to Lynton."

He was startled by the quickness of Mr. Lennard's rejoinder, "I wish you would."

There was an instant's silence. The little tinkling bell of the quaint old church hard by was ringing for some evening service. It seemed to Milly like the pulsing of her own heart made audible, as she waited for Bob's decision. While he and Lina conferred together, she turned aside to that rose tree on the wall of the cottage inn, and pulled a bud unconsciously. Then she went a few steps along the lane. Was it the keen air that sent a shiver through her? The air was keen and clear; overhead the tender grey blue of the sky was growing to pale gold.

When she turned, she saw that a new comer had joined the little group, a tall, thin youth, with very large, expressive eyes. James Lennard had his hand on his shoulder; it was not difficult to guess that this was his youngest-born, the

embryo priest and fierce philanthropist from Oxford. And again Milly noted that strange thing, that he too had no consciousness that any one was present at all except his father. But by-and-by James Lennard separated from him, and, leaving him with the rest, came up to where Milly stood aloof. And this is what he said, in a paternal manner, to young Maurice's betrothed :

“The other day I heard an old gentleman say to a young lady, ‘I never saw you before, and I shall never see you again. Will you shake hands with me?’ And now I say to you, my dear young lady, whom I may not see again, if your brother will not come to Lynton, ‘Will you give me that rose, as a memento of our pleasant holiday?’”

Milly smiled as she put the flower in his hand. There was something incongruous in his calling himself old. His tireless activity of body, his intense mental energy, his freshness of sympathy, his enthusiasm—expended upon wider aims than that of his boys, but not less boyishly ardent and alive than theirs—put any ordinary reckoning of his mere years altogether beside the question. The ideas of age, of time, did not occur in connection with this stirring, buoyant, impressionable yet powerful temperament;

they had no relevancy in his case. It has been said that "genius is ever young, in heart at least," and you find here and there natures of rare endowment that share the high prerogative.

The two moved back to where the council of war was being held at the door of the Ship.

"Do, do say yes!" little Amy was saying to her new friend Lina, caressing her hand.

"It only remains for Milly to say yes," said Bob. "The rest of us are pretty well agreed."

Milly looked from one face to the other, to see if indeed so much happiness was appointed her. Could it be true that they were all to have that glorious drive together, over the wild moorland, the haunt of the red deer, by the Severn sea, brilliant in the persistent sunshine, through heather and ferns glistening with dew, filling the brisk air with aromatic odours?

"I should like nothing better in the world," said Milly, with a sudden flush that made her face beautiful, like the sky at sunset.

A few final arrangements, and the two parties separated. The wood fire was crackling gaily, as usual, in the snug inn-parlour, and the cloth was laid for dinner. After dinner there was whist, and there was, of course, more chat over the day's adventures than was altogether consistent with the rules and interests of the game.

They were all in high spirits and inclined for talk, except, perhaps, Nigel, who remained a little moody and critical. It was astonishing how much Milly had to say about the passing beauties of Exmoor. The air on the hills, the vegetation in the valleys, the clear rushing streams, the gigantic blackberries, the freedom, the wildness, the absolute solitude—it was all far, far beyond her dreams.

“Yes, Lennard was not far out about Exmoor,” said Bob, who was dealing leisurely. “I used to laugh about his craze, but he’ll have the laugh on his side now. I think we’re all bitten.”

“You’ll be joining Food Reform Leagues and Women’s Rights Associations next,” said Nigel, with a sardonic smile.

“Oh, you should have seen him with that fellow to-day!” said Bob, ignoring the sarcasm. “He was a very queer chap. He would only snap and snarl, and declare there was nothing the matter, and he should walk home presently. But directly Lennard strode up and spoke to him he quieted down like magic. It is something in his eye, I think. He let him undo his clothes and feel about till he found out it was a broken rib, and then he actually consented to be carried on some hurdles Lennard sent for down to the farm. No wonder Lord Porlock took

him for a doctor. It was all *he* could do to prevail on him to go in a chair. He wanted to walk—the maniac!”

“I wonder where Mr. Lennard picked up his knowledge,” said Lina.

“He was about the hospitals a good deal at one time,” said Bob. “But it seems like a kind of intuition with him. And, then, it is not what he *knows*, but the curious magnetic power he has. There is something in his personality which every one succumbs to in a moment. It was most curious this morning. The man obeyed him like a child.”

“A dangerous sort of power, if one presumed upon it,” snarled Nigel.

“That you can see *he* would never do,” said Lina, warmly. “He is as conscientious and as gentle and as humble-minded as—as a woman!”

IX.

The wonder and interest to Milly of this man's character increased every day that she was in his company. It may be that the contrast it presented to the type of mind she had been most familiar with—narrow, dogmatic, inflexible, violently prejudiced, and,

so far from being mellowed, rendered more rigid by age—had something to say to its fascination for her. However that might be, she never tired of marvelling at the fresh treasures it revealed as each day went by. Here was a man who had lived much and long in a world not for the most part governed by high-mindedness and nobleness, yet who was untainted by its touch. Brought up to a profession in which the true and just have constantly to be sacrificed to the possible and expedient, fresh conditions to old institutions, the living breathing anxious present to the dead or moribund past, his sympathy in the actual condition of his fellow men had not been parched up, but had rather taken deeper root in all that he knew of their privations, and all that he understood of their wrongs. He had neither the lawyer's dread of the ideal nor the man-of-the-world's dread of the exceptional. He had identified himself, in Parliament and out of it, with every movement of his day in the direction of social reform, however unpopular in exalted quarters, however unsavoury in the nostrils of dwellers in polite fools' paradises. With two great causes his name had been more particularly associated—the promotion of better hygienic conditions

among the masses, and the raising of the social and political status of women. In the former, he saw the first step towards a true civilisation; in the latter, the best hope of a purer morality; in other words, of national stability and progress. His intimate acquaintance with existing institutions was in favour of his adopting the most practical means towards his various ends; but, while he eschewed the visionary and chimerical, he clung fast to his conception of the thing that should be, allowing neither opposition, nor self-interest, nor the canker of low views of life to interfere with his steadfast pursuit of it.

During those bright days at Lynton an idea suggested itself to Milly which she dismissed at first as too bold, but which kept recurring so persistently that she ended by resolving to carry it out. It was that she would ask Mr. Lennard's help and advice in the matter of the transference of that twenty-five thousand pounds to Bob. He had shown her so much gentle, fatherly kindness, that she felt sure he would not consider such a step an impertinence on her part, or resent it as a breach of etiquette. And he was so open-minded, he had such a large generous way of looking at things, that she was equally certain he would not think her

ridiculous, and scout the idea, as Nigel had done, with a vehement and more than half-contemptuous abruptness. So she watched her opportunity, nerving herself for the tremendous audacity of consulting the great man on her own private affairs.

It was not a very easy matter to get half an hour alone with him, although they were staying in the same Hotel. From the day they travelled to Lynton together, he seemed to enter into Bob and Lina's conspiracy, and take the greatest care that if Milly were left alone with any one, it should be Nigel Maurice. Still more heartily he entered into that other more general conspiracy by which everything was to be done to banish thought and care from Milly's heart, and restore her to full health and spirits. But that was very different from monopolising her society. If she expressed admiration for a particular kind of flower, and found it beside her plate at breakfast the next morning; if certain specially nourishing foods or refreshing drinks were recommended to her notice in a gentle but *ex cathedra* tone which was curiously difficult to resist; if the last new work of some American humourist, or equally witty and cheery English writer, appeared on the table at the exact moment when she happened to

wish for an hour's rest with a book; if ventilation was adjusted with peculiar nicety when she was present, and the cosiest arm chair always happened to be the only one untenanted when she came into the room;—all this was nothing more, at least it was very little more, than what the Dasents and Nigel, and even Amy and Claud Lennard, were doing every day. Ernest and Philip had been left behind at Porlock Weir. Every one knew that this trip to Exmoor had been planned exclusively for Milly's benefit; and there was something in her great gentleness and sweet, tender, unassuming ways that, without this knowledge, would have won for her the regard and loving services of each.

But by dint of patience and tenacity of purpose, Milly found her opportunity at last. It was in the course of a long day they were spending in the Doone valley, one of those sunny October days they remembered to the end of their lives—they were so strangely beautiful for England—when you could sketch or read, sit or lie on the “sheep-trimmed” turf, and but for the brilliant autumnal colouring and the absence of the tourist herd, fancy it was midsummer. Lina and Amy were sketching; Bob, Nigel, and Amy had proposed going to

look for the famous waterslide of Mr. Blackmore's romance; Mr. Lennard was on the point of going too, when he noticed that Milly, who was standing a little way off by herself, seemed undecided as to what she should do. As Nigel took no notice of her, he went up to her himself.

"*You* will not come with us," he said. "You have walked too much already. But what will you do? You will be lonely. Artists are no company, except for each other. They are self-absorbed, tiresome people."

"I should have liked to come with you," said Milly. "I wanted—the fact is, if you would not think me very troublesome, I had a little favour to ask of you."

The Q.C. bowed in his old-world manner. "I am quite at your service," he said. "But you are not going to walk. You are going to sit down here, and I am going to sit down too, and you shall tell me all about it."

Milly protested. She was depriving him of the walk. She was depriving the others of his society. She was behaving altogether like a most selfish, inconsiderate, forward person.

"My dear young lady——" began Mr. Lennard, warmly. Then he checked himself, and added in a different tone, a tone in which there

was just a shade too much formal politeness, "I shall esteem it a privilege if I can be of any service to you. I have explored the Doone Valley many times. You know that my early home was in the West country."

"Oh yes. It was in Devonshire that you knew my uncle so well," said Milly.

"Yes. He used to come to see my father. He and my father had a great deal in common. They both belonged to the old school. They were staunch believers in absolutism, whether in national or family government. I believe they would have had no objection to revive the Roman fathers' power of life and death over his household."

It seemed that Mr. Lennard had noticed Milly's great embarrassment, and chatted on to allow her time to recover herself. He spoke very quietly, with a quiet smile. And all around there was silence, save for a murmur now and then from where the sketchers were sitting, or the scuttling of a frightened rabbit among the brushwood close beside them.

"It is very difficult," went on the Q.C., still smiling, "to wholly recover having passed the early years of your life under a despotism. I am not sure that something servile does not linger in your blood to the end of the

chapter. It may be that I was tame-spirited in submitting to have my life mapped out by another person. At any rate, the fear that I misconstrued my duty at the time has made me doubly anxious to leave my own boys entire freedom of choice. Do you think I have done well?"

He turned quickly, almost abruptly, to Milly as he spoke. You would have said that her opinion upon this matter was of great moment to him.

But Milly could not meet his gaze. Her heart was prompting her to say something which could only be said with downcast eyes.

"You have won their devoted love," she murmured. "Could there be a better proof that you have done right?"

He answered nothing for a moment, and in the wonderful silence, the blue sky and the dancing limpid stream and every small leaf and grass blade seemed charged with a mystic, dumb, unutterable joy.

When he spoke it was to go back to the brother despots.

"There was one difference between the two men," he said, musingly. "One was a good man of business, the other a bad. You know they both went into commerce on the break-up

of the Company, but my father very soon had enough of it, and came to live down here on a small income. Your uncle, on the other hand, rapidly made a large fortune."

"It was on that very subject that I wished to speak to you," said Milly, seizing her opportunity, and taking her courage with both hands. "You know, that most unexpectedly—unfortunately—he left the whole of it to me."

"I also know," said the Q.C., in measured tones, "that it was a poor and inadequate reward for years of patient, devoted, and, in a special sense, self-denying care."

Again there was a pause. Something checked the hasty disclaimer that rose to Milly's lips; and it came to pass, that instead of speaking, she looked straight before her with moist eyes and a sort of tremulous smile. It was a thing that could not be resisted or gainsaid, the prophetic insight of this man—the way he read your history and your heart, with the accuracy of a magician, the solicitude of a lover, the surrounding, sustaining tenderness of a fatherly friend.

But presently, lest the conversation should take a fresh turn, and the precious opportunity be lost, Milly began to tell her story; how she could not be happy until Bob had received what

was his due ; how she had no thought of living at the Croft, but in London, where she could work ; how, in consequence, the income of twenty-five thousand pounds, to say nothing of the rent of the house, would be enough—would be too much for her needs.

“I would make a still fairer division,” wound up Milly, eagerly, “only I know that Bob would not hear of it. As it is, it will be difficult enough to get him to take anything. And that is another point upon which I—I wanted help.”

She paused in the midst of her long speech, partly to take breath, and partly to see whether she might venture to proceed. Glancing anxiously at her neighbour, she was surprised to behold a rather puzzled expression upon his face. He was listening with the most absorbed attention, but with a very slight contraction of the brows that indicated perplexity. What could it mean? How could there be anything in her very simple statement of a simple transaction to puzzle the great lawyer? Surely it was not vexation? He was not displeased with her boldness, or casting about for a way to reprove her folly?

“I do hope,” she began, in her alarm, “that you are not vexed with me, that you don’t think me stupid—like——”

"Like whom?" asked the Q.C. quietly.

"Oh, I was going to tell you how Mr. Maurice had dissuaded me, or tried to."

"Mr. Maurice! Did *he* think you '*stupid*'?"

"He said I was not to think or speak of anything so preposterous," said Milly, rather plaintively. "I could see he thought me very ignorant and foolish to propose such a thing. *Do you?*" Milly added, desperately, for she was still in great anxiety and suspense, turning in final appeal to her companion.

"No," said James Lennard, slowly. "No, I do not. I think your project very characteristically noble and sweet. Nor do I see any objection to its being carried out—except one."

"And that is——" said Milly, anxiously.

He looked at her. He could see nothing in her face that betokened any background thought. It expressed, with childlike candour and childlike eagerness, the question on her tongue—that was all.

"Can it be possible?" mused James Lennard, as he sought to read the sweet eyes. "Has she given her heart to this man, and does he think her stupid, and does she come to me for the counsel which as lawyer, and as lover, it is he who should give her?"

"My dear," he said aloud, with a strain of

father-like tenderness in his voice that went—not for the first time—to the very depths of Milly's soul, “you must know best.”

“Indeed I cannot guess,” she said.

“Must I tell you?” he rejoined, smiling. “But it is trespassing on delicate ground. You wish me to speak out? How, then, can you persist in desiring to part with half your fortune, contrary to the wishes of your future husband?”

“My future husband!” repeated Milly, with a little cry, and a start and a flush of genuine amazement. Then his meaning dawned upon her, and she added more quietly, with a smile, “You are speaking of Mr. Maurice? You must not think I do not like him and—and respect him. But marriage—I had not thought of that! I shall never marry—Mr. Maurice.”

X.

It was moonlight in the Valley of Rocks. The weird grandeur of the scene was undisturbed by any human footfall. The little procession of six people, winding their way under the towering crags to the fern-covered common, near the Castle Rock, had the fairy place all to

themselves. They moved slowly, with hushed voices and hushed footsteps, watching the moon sail over the grim peaks and begin to cast a pathway of light upon the sea. First came James Lennard and Milly, conversing in almost whispered tones; then Claud Lennard and his cousin, on whose bright voice a kind of spell had fallen, and who was thinking of Oberon and Titania, and witches' holes and fairy rings; Bob and Lina followed, arm-in-arm, discussing under their breath some weighty affair of state.

"I saw perfectly well it was not the letters," Lina was saying in an emphatic whisper. "He tried to make out he had had a very important post this morning which he had not attended to, but that was all fiddle-de-dee. My belief is, if you could peep in at the sitting-room window now, you would find him smoking with a novel."

"Poor old Nigel! There's no doubt he has been very down on his luck the last few days," said Bob, musingly. "I suppose he doesn't make as much way as he expected. It's very odd. I thought it was all going as smoothly as possible. Have you said anything to Milly?"

"Milly is rather unapproachable on those subjects," said Lina. "She always was a queer girl. And, then, one is so dreadfully afraid of

spoilings things by saying too much. I thought it was best to let her alone. But of course I have noticed that in proportion as Nigel's spirits fell her spirits rose, and I own I am fairly puzzled. She hints in a sly mysterious manner about 'getting her own way at last,' and about something tremendously delightful that is going to happen. In fact, she is her old self again, bright and cheery and chatty."

"That is something gained, at all events."

"Yes; but I am so vexed they don't seem to understand each other better. I wonder whether there has been any little hitch?"

Bob thought that was scarcely compatible with Milly's gaiety; but he undertook to sound Nigel that night as discreetly as might be, in case his estrangement from Milly had been the result of a misunderstanding which a judicious friend could help to put right. Lina agreed at the same time to speak to Milly, and find out what she really felt towards her suitor. Things had gone on long enough in this uncomfortable, unsatisfactory fashion. If they were destined to end in a manner adverse to the wishes of the two plotters, so much the worse; but end in one way or another it was time that they should. Affairs must somehow be brought to a climax.

“Bob, there is just one thing,” said Lina, rather hesitatingly, by way of a wind-up to the conversation, “I don’t know whether it has occurred to you, but I have fancied now and then that Mr. Lennard seemed a good deal taken with Milly.”

“Lennard, with Milly!” exclaimed Bob, suppressing a laugh with some difficulty. “Why, he will never marry again. Lennard! You know he might have married Lady Susan Wylie any day; she was desperately in love with him. So was Mrs. Vane Savile. Lennard marry Milly! Why he is old enough to be her father!”

Of course it was only diffidently and in such an hour of solemn confidence that Lina could have hinted at the possibility of so much condescension on the part of Bob’s hero. Besides, the probability that Milly, who had shown little disposition for marriage with any one, would elect to marry a widower with grown-up children, was sufficiently remote. Lina seemed a little ashamed of herself, and changed the subject.

But at the very moment she was speaking, James Lennard was telling Milly how every thought that was in her mind, and every word she spoke, and every look of gentle compassion, of horror at wrong, and passionate endeavour for the right that he had seen in her—had been

laid up in his heart. He was telling her how he intimately shared the interests to which she desired to devote her life, and how he thought that perhaps his knowledge and experience might be of some little use to her in shaping her future course. It was on this ground alone that he ventured, knowing she was free and even meditating a solitary life, to offer her his hand. He knew that her conduct through life had always been actuated by other than personal motives.

"I should gain nothing," he said, very tenderly, "by promising to devote my every thought to your happiness; even were I presumptuous enough to feel that I should succeed as well as another man. But I think—I know—that I can help you in what you value more than your own happiness. Will you let me try?"

They had wandered away from the rest, down one of the grassy glades among the reddening fern. Close above their heads towered the giant mass of rock which they had climbed the day before to watch the sunset from; opposite, on the other side of the valley, the Devil's Cheese-ring, a cluster of huge boulders perched on the green slope, spoke to them of ancient superstition and of modern genius. And over all lay the silver moonlight. It was a scene suf-

ficiently bewildering in itself. And now, besides this wild, enchanted beauty, there was heaven opening, and a vision of comfort and blessing and rest—ah! more than this—a vision of rapture, descending upon Milly's soul.

How was she to tell him what he was to her? How could even he understand? To have been fed and clothed, but never understood; to have had gold showered upon one, but never sympathy; to have been ruled, not fathered; loved conditionally, with a sort of tolerance (even Nigel loved that way); not cherished with the unreserved, unquestioning allegiance of the heart—it took a woman to know what all this meant. And, without knowing it, it was impossible to fathom this strange, supreme—dimly presaged, indeed—and yet utterly unlooked-for joy.

So Milly answered him only by putting her hand, gently, of her own accord, through his arm.

But he was not satisfied.

“My dear, have I asked too much?”

“A thousand, thousand times no,” said Milly, in rather a broken whisper. “Only you have made me so happy; I can't think of the work, or of anything but that—so happy——”

* * * * *

When Lina went into Milly's room that even-

ing she was prepared for a long talk, but something Milly said made her leave it again in a very short time to catch her husband before he closeted himself with Nigel. She found him prowling about his room for slippers and cigars. She shut the door, and, as soon as she had recovered her breath, she said, in a tone of mingled amazement, excitement, and triumph, which fairly took away his, "Bob! Bob! *I was perfectly right.*"

And, of course, it followed that the other interview arranged, the one between Bob and Nigel was of rather a different character from what had been planned. There was no necessity now for explanations of any kind. All that had to be done was to prepare the rejected suitor as kindly and as delicately as possible for the news of the morrow.

Bob found his task easier than he had expected. Mr. Lennard and his son had gone to their rooms, and Nigel was alone in the sitting-room writing letters—not, as Lina had predicted, smoking over a novel. He looked up as his friend entered.

"Oh, by the way, Bob, old fellow!" he said, with a fine affectation of carelessness, "I find I shall have to leave to-morrow, after all. I have secured a place on the coach. It is just

as I thought. Lawson is making a frightful hash of that injunction action; and on reading his letter again I see there is no help for it. Sorry as I am, I must go."

Then Bob went and put his hand on his friend's shoulder, and made him an affectionate little speech, expressing his great regret at his enforced departure, and the breaking-up of their pleasant party, but not urging, as in different circumstances he would strongly have urged, a change of intention. The omission was not lost upon Nigel, who, for some days past, had known better than his friend that he was in a false position, and had been meditating retreat.

He got up and began lighting a cigarette.

"By-the-by," he began again, between the puffs, "I fancy you will have some news for me before very long."

"Ah, you expected it!" said Bob. "*I* never was more taken by surprise in my life. But you're quite right. I think you will hear something before long."

"I wish them joy with all my heart," said Nigel, in rather a lighter tone than was usual with him, extending himself in an easy chair, with his back to Bob. "They are very well suited to one another. Lennard is full of the same sort of——"

“Crotchets,” put in Bob.

“Crotchets, if you like, as your sister, and any one can see that is all she cares about.”

“Still it is a strange choice,” said Bob, ignoring the touch of pique. “One would have expected her to look on Lennard in the light of a father.”

In the light of a father! But it was precisely in that light that Milly, orphaned, and forlorn in spirit, had begun by looking on her new friend, and it was to the father in the husband that she still looked for the firmest support and for the dearest cherishing. Some women, even apart from early orphanhood, are made so.

This was the strongest strand in the threefold cord that bound her to him. The other two were his espousal of the cause of womanhood, and that recognition of the physical needs of our humanity which she had learned, partly from her own weakness, to be of the first importance in all regenerative effort. He cared—not grudgingly and by the way—but with an intensity of purpose rare as yet among minds of the deepest insight, for the well-being of the body—unshaken by any bogey of “materialism” in his conviction that it was the true basis of energy and of virtue, as well as the main condition of happiness.

The morning came, bright and beautiful as ever; and Milly, who had not slept very much that night, went out early into the garden to feast her eyes upon one of the loveliest scenes our England boasts of, and her heart upon its treasure of new, unfathomable joy. The trees in the lovely valley were changing and shedding their leaves, but the gardens were bright with geraniums and sweet with mignonette; sea and sky were calm and blue, and opposite, the rose-tints of Countisbury foreland shone through a summer-like haze that magnified their beauty. Milly was standing on the lawn lost in her sweet dream, when she felt a plaid gently thrown across her shoulders. Turning quickly, with a happy smile, she saw her betrothed standing there, holding out both hands to her. He said nothing, but he took one of hers in each, and looked long—long—into her face.

“How kind of you to think of that!” Milly said at last.

“You forgot it was not June,” he said. “And indeed, indeed, you were almost justified in forgetting. It is warmer than I thought. What a scene! What a paradise! Is that the coach creeping up the hill yonder? I am sorry I did not see Maurice before he left.”

“He sent us all farewell messages,” said

Milly. Then she added, after a moment's pause, "And do you know what I did? The instant he was gone, I went to Lina and told her how good you had been about their money—for you know it *is* theirs morally—and that you said it could be made over to them at once. Of course she didn't believe me, and said Bob would never take it, and all that; but I told her if they would not listen to me, *you would see justice done.*"

Again he did not speak. He seemed to be intently watching the Minehead coach slowly crawling up the almost perpendicular hill.

"It is such a load off my mind," Milly went on, hoping her prattle did not seem very trivial to the great man who was her lover. "That is one of the many, many things I have to thank *you* for. You know, I thought that I was never to be happy again. And now—I don't know what it is—but I feel like a child again. I caught myself singing this morning while I was dressing. Did you hear me? It is so long since I have sung—in the morning."

Then James Lennard mastered the emotion with which he had listened to the simple talk of this transparent, leal, and loving soul.

"My child," he said gently, "I can hardly

believe that it has been my good fortune to be all this to you. I have been thinking this morning"—here his eyes wandered once again to the coach disappearing over the brow of the hill—"whether, after all, a younger man——"

"You are the youngest person I know," interrupted Milly, promptly. "I never saw any one so fresh and interested in things and full of life as you are. Well, there *was* one person—" Milly added, a momentary shade dimming the gladness of her eyes. "He was three years old."

"Imagine comparing three with fifty-three!"

"Is that your age?" asked Milly, carelessly.

"Fifty-three last month," said the Q.C.

"Then fifty-three is the nicest age I know," said Milly.

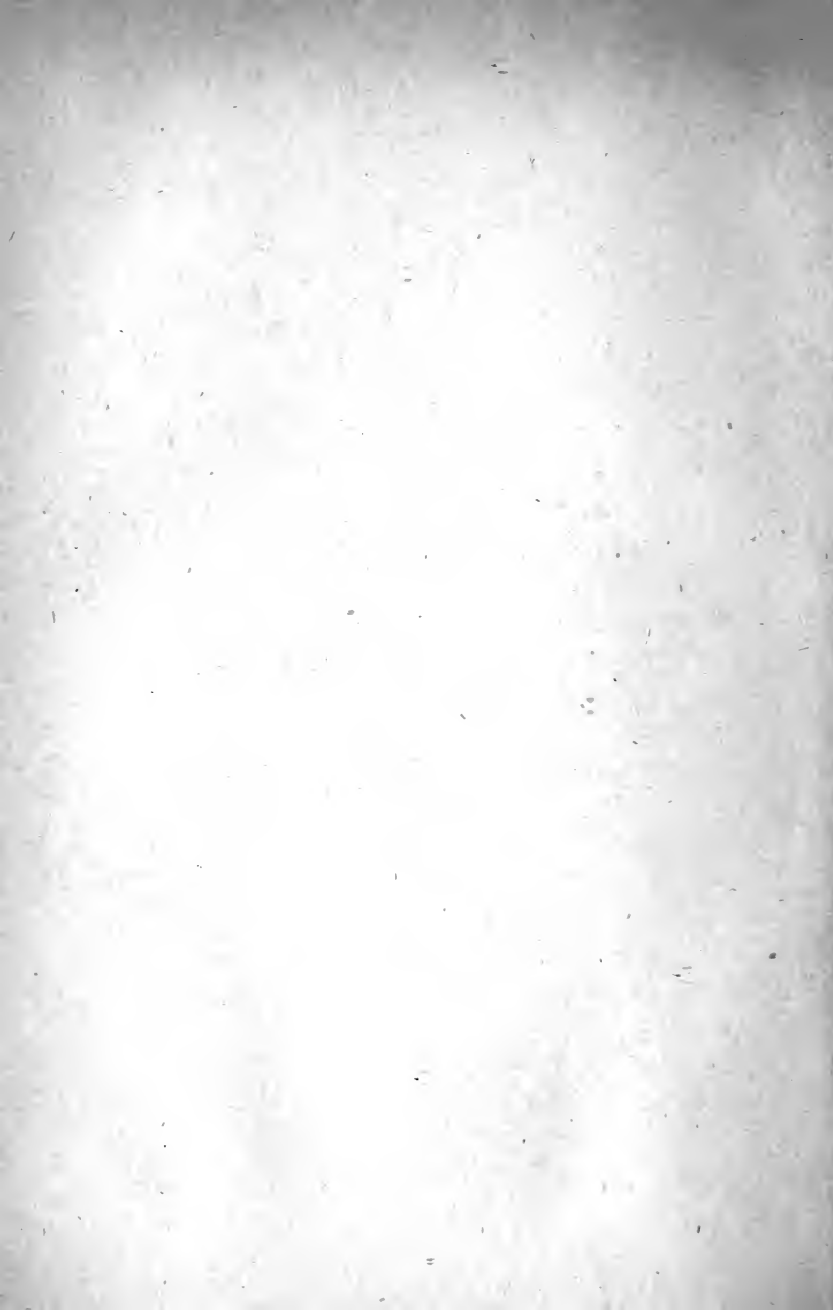


THREE FRAGMENTS OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY.



I.

KING MINOR.



KING MINOR.



I.

“THE only real objection,” said Maud, practical, even when her heart was set upon a thing, “is Mike.”

I stroked my beard musingly.

“Is she pretty?” I asked.

My wife stooped forward, and drew a little Venetian mirror that stood on the table nearer to her, so that she could look at herself without the trouble of getting up.

“I really forget,” she said quite gravely, “it’s so long since I looked—I mean with any other view than to see if I was tidy. (You know, she’s just like me.) Well, she has the kind of hair people who admire it call auburn, and people who don’t, red; the square forehead and hollow cheeks some of the painters

like so much now; grey, watery-looking eyes, with dark eye-lashes; rather a stupid expression——”

“An expression people who admire it call poetical, and people who don’t, stupid,” I corrected. “Go on.”

Maud always amused me vastly when she gave vent to the vein of half-unconscious humour in her character. She happened to be matter-of-fact as well as Scotch—I say *happened*, because all Scotch people are not matter-of-fact, any more than all English people are practical, or all Irish witty—and very often said the raciest things absolutely without knowing it.

“I think that’s all,” said Maud.

“Well, but why should Mike fall in love with her? Not for the same reason that I fell in love with you; for I was a full-blown parson with a full-grown beard when I was first struck with your admirable common-sense, and Mike’s only a schoolboy with the traditional contempt for ‘carrots.’”

“Mike is eighteen,” said Maud; “and though I admit that he is a good deal engrossed with his games, and is not very sentimentally inclined at present——”

I cut her short with a shout of laughter. I

couldn't imagine big, jovial, apple-faced Michael King forswearing his pals of the cricket-field and the racquet-court to philander about a dreamy, demure Scotch lassie, who knew nothing about boys from having no brothers or cousins of her own, and who, so far from sympathizing in any of his active tastes, would probably be afraid of going out in a shower.

It happened rather curiously that I had never seen Maisie, this sister-in-law of mine. In the summer-time her invalid father would never leave, or let her leave, their Highland home; and the only time since our marriage that we were able to arrange a month's visit to Scotland, my curate was taken ill, and Maud had to go North without me. The winters they had always spent in some foreign health-resort—Madeira, Algiers, Egypt. Since my father-in-law's death, Maisie had been with an aunt in Dresden, and so it came to pass that I was unacquainted with the new inmate whom it was proposed that we should add to our sufficiently large household.

Refuse to take her in, at my wife's request, now that her natural home seemed to be with us, I could not. Yet I knew even better than Maud what the squeeze would be, and I also had scruples, perhaps not entirely

fanciful, on the score of the Kings. Apart from sentimental possibilities which, I own, did not weigh with me quite so much as with her, I was anxious that nothing should interfere with the duty we owed to the orphan boys, towards whom we had undertaken to act the part of parents. They were not relations, which was precisely the reason one felt specially careful of their interests. They were the sons of a deeply-loved friend of my father's; and it was on his death-bed that my father had said to me, "As long as you live, never let Rodney King's boys want a father and a home." I took in two of them then and there—the third, considerably older, was soldiering in India—having been recently appointed to a district church in a large town, which boasted a rising school. It was not that they were penniless—they had five thousand pounds apiece; but they were practically friendless, and Maud and I were proud and glad to be friends to them for their own and for my honoured father's sake. Only to execute his charge faithfully made considerable demands both upon time and patience, and sometimes involved not a little anxiety. I was scarcely prepared for undertaking an added responsibility of the same nature.

But Maud carried the day, as wives do; and

before many weeks had passed, I found myself setting out to meet Miss Mary Caird at the station. It happened to be a half-holiday, and too wet for cricket, and both the Kings were loafing in the lobby, where we kept hats and coats, and where, while we were conventionally supposed to "tidy up," we were tacitly allowed to make what messes we pleased in the way of chemical experiments, botanical litter, and aquaria improvised out of washhand-basins.

"Who'll walk down to the station with me?" I asked.

"To meet *her*?" answered Mike, accentuating the feminine pronoun with a suspicion of scorn, as though no further negative were required.

"I will, uncle," said Edric, promptly, shaking his hands over his basin, and polishing off the last drops on his trousers.

Edric, or, as we called him by way of a pet-name, Edie King, was of a very different make from his burly brother. He was short for fifteen, and, judging by his thin cheeks and delicate skin, you would have judged him to have been (as, in fact, he was) a motherless baby, brought up on some flagitious starchy compound, or other "nourishing" diet of man's unblest invention, crammed with anything and everything except the nearest available

approach to Nature's unerring prescription. I had, perhaps on this account, a secret partiality for him, though he was very quiet and reserved, and considered by most people—Maud included—as far less engaging than the open-hearted, confiding, high-spirited chatterbox, Mike. I fancied he reciprocated the feeling after a fashion of his own, for the boy was wonderfully considerate of me in a thousand little unsuspected ways, and I never challenged him to do anything or go anywhere with me that he did not respond with a readiness which was almost touching. I remember asking him that afternoon as we ploughed through the muddy streets together, with our hands in our pockets and our collars up to our ears, whether he wouldn't sooner have stayed with Mike. "You know I like defying the elements," I added.

"So do I—when I'm with you," said Edie, simply.

There was the usual Saturday afternoon crush at the station—people going away for Sunday, and people coming for Sunday—to say nothing of the ordinary traffic, and I sent Edie to one end of the train to look out for a young lady exactly like "Auntie," while I peered about at the other.

Presently he came back, all smiles and blushes, with the object of our search, whom, in fact, it would have been difficult for anybody who knew Maud to mistake. Like Maud, she was rather over the middle height, slender, and gracefully proportioned; she had the same very white skin, the same pretty *nez retroussé* and short upper lip, the same auburn hair, the same slow-dawning smile, that broke upon you, like English sunshine, with a gradual, reluctant sweetness. She looked a few years younger—that was all.

“I’ve found her!” said Edric, triumphantly.

“How did he introduce himself, Maisie?” I said, taking her by the hands. “As King Minor?”

Maisie looked up at me gravely. “Is that his name?” she said, half seriously, half absently.

I know it was very rude of me, but the matter-of-fact question was so like Maud that I simply burst out laughing.

“Well, that’s his official appellation,” I said. “At home we call him Edie, after Edie Ochiltree.”

“Oh, I know now,” said Maisie, as if she had been thinking out a problem; “he’s one of the Kings!”

Presently I noticed that she began to look

very hard at Edric, who was sitting opposite to her in the fly which was taking us home. I thought it hardly likely she could be struck with his appearance, for Edie had no particular beauty to boast of. He had good eyes, and, for a boy, a peculiarly sweet genial smile; but, then, his delicate cheeks were freckled, his ears large and too prominent, his whole aspect, to a casual observer, merely that of the average schoolboy. It must be something else that attracted Maisie.

"Do you know," she said, suddenly, though not quickly—she never spoke quickly—"you are very like a Mr. King who came over with us from Calais yesterday. I wonder if he's a relation of yours."

"I have no relations, only one brother; he's in India," said Edie.

"Oh," said Maisie.

"How very seldom your brother writes!" I observed.

"Yes; he's not much of a correspondent," assented Edie. "He's a queer chap," he added, proceeding to blush to the roots of his hair.

I set that down to shyness, and, in fact, shy as Edie was by nature, I noticed that from that day forth he was shyer with Maisie than with anybody else. Mike avoided her simply because strangers, strange ladies especially, bored him;

Edric, evidently because he was afraid of boring her, and because it seemed good to him to extend to her some of that reverence he paid to Maud, and, as it were instinctively, to womanhood generally, even including his play-mates, our baby-girls.

That, at least, was the way in which I accounted for his behaviour at first, though, when Maisie had been with us a few weeks, I began to think it might be owing to a different cause. I had seen boys of his age form, not sentimental, but quiet, faithful, so to speak, dog-like attachments to women older than themselves, and it seemed to me that Edric's chivalrous respect for my sister-in-law was ripening into something of that sort, and that, as the days went by, his boyish happiness more and more depended upon her presence and her kindness. He began to be a great deal with her. He would start and colour with pleasure whenever she came into the room, and forego the most exciting matches, and even (what he loved best) his long "butterflying" rambles with one or two beloved school-friends, to escort her in the walks she would otherwise have been compelled to take alone.

Michael continued imperturbable as ever, Maud's vaticinations notwithstanding; and so

things went on smoothly enough, until one Sunday morning, when a very startling occurrence took place—the arrival, namely, of a letter by the post for King Major. He got so few that he looked very important indeed as he read this one, and spoke very indifferently indeed when he proceeded to communicate its somewhat astonishing contents.

“My brother’s come home. He’s been in England a month, and he wants to come and see us.”

The next remark, promptly uttered by Edric, astonished me, for one, at least as much.

“Then he *was* the Mr. King you came across with!”

He did not look at Maisie as he spoke, and directly he had finished began applying his teaspoon to the jam on Ethel’s pinafore.

“Edie, good boy—take ’way jam,” announced Ethel, in a tone of the utmost complacence.

I have no doubt Maisie was obliged to her, for a faint tinge of pink had mounted to her pale cheek at Edric’s sudden observation.

It set me thinking.

Had she seen more of this “Mr. King” than just crossing with him? Was it possible, outside a novel, to fall in love (on a smooth day, understood) between Calais and Dover? There was a mystery here which I should have

made up my mind to consult Maud about, only that I knew perfectly well Maud would say something of this kind, "Maisie in love! What extraordinary fancies you have, George. You'll be saying Edric's in love next, or Ethel. Maisie! Why, she hasn't said a word about it to *me*."

As if that were not precisely the very strongest of all possible arguments in favour of my own view.

Presently Maisie said quietly, "Yes, it must have been your brother. Tall and dark, isn't he, with a moustache?"

"No; whiskers," said Mike, bluntly.

"Ah! but our photograph's so old," put in Edie, as he jumped up and ran out of the room. He came back in a minute or two with a little yellow, faded Indian *carte-de-visite*—the face so small and faded that one could see all likeness had departed. All you could say was that it was a smart young officer in uniform.

Nevertheless Maisie said directly, "It is the same."

And of course there followed a chorus of exclamations and questions and wonderings.

Maisie smiled in the faint, dream-like, Caird way as she told what she knew.

They had met first at the Louvre, in Paris, and she had sat next him at *table d'hôte*. Then he

had turned up on board the steamboat, and he and the people who had brought her from Dresden had talked a great deal. Then he had talked to her. They had parted at the "Lord Warden." That was all.

"Well, he won't be a stranger to you, for one," commented Michael. "For my own part, I shouldn't know him if I met him in the street. How many years is it since we saw him, Edie?"

"Seven," answered Edie, promptly.

"Do you think you can have him, uncle?" asked Mike, in quite a pleading tone, forgetting all his importance.

As he spoke he handed me the letter, in which Rodney King speculated on the possibility of Mr. Armytage being able to "do with him" next week for a day or two.

The question put me into a dilemma. Dearly as I should have liked to give the boys' friendless elder brother a hearty welcome to my house, I wanted to get to the bottom of those blushes of Maisie's first. So I fell back on the practical difficulty, and said with mock seriousness, "How about your drawing-room sofa, auntie? I dare say Mr. Rodney could put up with that. It's roomy, and it's got good springs."

"Nine o'clock," was Maud's pertinent rejoinder.

It was her habit to calmly ignore my flippant speeches.

So Maisie and I trotted off to school together, and the question of the accommodation of her mysterious friend of the Channel was, for the time being, suspended.

Sunday, the more's the pity, is not a good day for reflection with us parsons. Driven all day long from pillar to post, from school to church, from church to class, from class to meeting, it is the day that we have the least chance of inhaling the good that comes of contemplation, the day that we are happy if we can but *exhale* to any profit the stores gathered in during the week. Nevertheless, I always made a point of calling one hour on Sunday, the hour between tea and evening church, my own; and at that time no one, not even my wife, entered the study except by special invitation. I confess that I entered it myself that Sunday evening with a view to do nothing but shut my eyes in an armchair and think. I had not, however, taken the first step towards that restorative process when I observed that my sanctum had been violated during the afternoon. The boys had leave to write letters or read there when I was out, on condition that I discovered no traces of their presence when I came back, but to-day, the intruder—Mike,

of course—had left his desk and other litter scattered about over my table, and I approached it in some wrath, in order to verify my suspicions.

I am not going to apologize for catching sight of the words "*brother*," "*he is a rip*," in Edric's handwriting as I drew nearer. To begin with, I did not expect to find a half-written letter on the desk, and was consequently not making the usual supernatural effort to look at the button of the penwiper or the knobs on the inkstand or the pattern on the table-cloth, and *not* at the tremendous effusion in black and white, which is positively staring you in the face. And then there was so much confidence between the Kings and myself, that as often as not, I saw the letters they wrote and received, and they a large proportion of mine. But I did not go any further. I resorted to my thinking-chair, and began trying to puzzle out this fresh complication. I had not been thus occupied five minutes, when the door was burst open without very much ceremony, and Edric rushed into the room, pulling up suddenly when he saw me.

"Oh, I beg your pardon!" he said, with an awestruck face. "I thought I heard you say you were going on to the Downs after tea."

"So you did, but half an hour afterwards

you would have heard me unsay it, if you had been in my presence."

Edric knew I was not angry. So, without saying anything more, he began quietly putting his things together. Just as he was leaving the room, I said, "Stop a minute, Edie. Something in that letter of yours caught my eye just now."

Edie looked at me for one moment. Then his face grew scarlet.

"Would you mind my reading it all?" I went on quietly.

"Oh no," he said earnestly, as though repudiating such a thought. But I could see that from one cause or another he was very ill at ease.

"Thank you, my boy," I said, as I took the letter from him.

This was the letter, or as much of it as he had written. I forbear transcribing the exact orthography and punctuation.

"MY DEAR BUTLER,

"Though, whatever you may say to the contrary, it certainly is a case of three to one, I suppose I must be magnanimous, especially as you are on the sick list; and I suppose you will be expecting to hear from me all about the match. Long Major played splendidly, and

made 82 in the first innings; and Majoribanks made 37; and in our first innings altogether we got 205. Then, when the other fellows went in, Marjoribanks bowled so awfully well that we got them all out for 56, and they had to follow their innings. And in their second innings they did no better, and we succeeded in getting 40 runs for seven wickets, when they had to draw stumps. My eldest brother has come home. Don't be jealous. You know I'm very constant, faithful, etc. His name is Rodney St. John. King, of course. He is a rip——”

“I'm sorry I saw it, Edie,” said I, when I had finished the scrawl. “I don't think you wished me to. But let that pass. Now I *do* know that you—that your opinion of your eldest brother is that he is ‘a rip,’ you will understand my being very anxious to hear your grounds for that opinion.”

I spoke very seriously and gently. I knew what the boy was undergoing. Almost for the first time in his life he hesitated in answering me.

“Oh, a lot of things. I mean some things I heard last holidays at cousin Tom's: he's so rum, he's got such rum ways, he never writes,” blundered poor Edie.

I did not care to press him further. He was one of those whose reticence one respects, though they be but schoolboys, innocent of spelling. At the same time his great confusion, and the obviously serious nature of the information he was withholding from me—whether the concealment were due to honourable feeling, sensitiveness, or pride—did not tend to reassure me on the subject of my expected guest.

It was with a disagreeable sensation of growing perplexity that I said, "That will do, you can go," to Edie.

II.

THE next morning I caught Mike on his way to school, and told him I should have a line to put into his letter to his brother. "That is, if you see no just cause or impediment why I shouldn't give him a welcome," I added carelessly, though I was scanning Mike's jolly face rather narrowly.

Not a feature of it changed as he answered, adopting my semi-jocular tone, "Nothing but the sofa being too short for him! But, you know, auntie said she'd rig the garret up for

him. It's awfully good of her ! It's awfully good of you both," sang out Mike, as he made about three appalling bounds down the staircase. He had begun to whistle a waltz before he reached the bottom.

I made up my mind that he had not been let into Edie's secret, and could throw no light upon the problem of his elder brother's dubious reputation and erratic behaviour. There seemed no help for it but to do what I had already determined upon, namely, send Rodney King a guarded invitation, securing my retreat from what might prove an awkward position by fixing very definitely a date beyond which we should not be able to offer him such rough accommodation as we had. It was the kind of note one writes twice in the effort to be true as well as cordial, and cautious without being cold. I was thinking I might have done it better still, as I shut the garden gate behind me, on my way to one of a series of lectures to ladies I had helped to start in the town. Maisie would have been with me, only she had a cold that afternoon, and the day was chilly for September. Besides, she was not a particularly intellectual young person. She only cultivated her mind on principle, and came to my lectures chiefly to please me.

"I beg your pardon, but is this Christ Church Vicarage?"

The question startled me out of my reverie on the subject of Rodney King and Maisie, and I stared vacantly at the speaker.

He was a handsome, gentleman-like young fellow, probably not over thirty, though his sallow complexion and sunken cheek betokened the ravages, either of a noisome climate or of a protracted season of what is wickedly called wild oat sowing. He was "tall and dark, with a moustache," a very full and silky black moustache that hid the lips—those infallible prophets of character—veiling whatever of weakness there might be in the face. He answered to Maisie's description and to my own—shall I say foreboding?—so well, that it took me a very few seconds to shake off my surprise and realize that I was face to face with my *bête noire*, taken, as it were, by assault, and as powerless to resist any inroads he might be pleased to make upon me as though I had not been manœuvring against him for twenty-four hours. I thought of the note that had cost me so much, and sighed inwardly as I answered—

"It is, and I am the vicar. And I think I am speaking to Mr. Rodney King?"

"Mr. Armytage?" he exclaimed, shaking

hands cordially. "How strange I should have met you! Fancy your knowing me, when I was such a little chap when you saw me last! I shouldn't have known you a bit. Don't think me very cool, coming down on you in this way, but I got no answer from Michael this morning, so I thought I'd come down to some hotel here and look him up. I left my traps at the station on the chance of your being able to take me in here, as, of course, I want to see as much of the old fellows as possible, and just walked up to reconnoitre. But if it's the very least inconvenient, you know——"

I assured him that we were prepared for him, or should have been the next day, and begged him to come in. We would send down for his luggage. I was agreeably surprised by his pleasant, genial manner, and scarcely noticed a something—I do not know how to define it—in his tone; something nervous, uncertain, *shuffling*.

I recollected, as I led the way into the house, that Maud was out, and that we should find nobody but Maisie. I was on the point of saying something about her, when it struck me that I might possibly obtain some light on the relations of the two to one another if I brought them together without preparation. So I opened the drawing-room door without a word, and marched in, followed by my visitor.

It was a pretty picture I opened the door upon. Maisie was sitting on a low chair with the second baby, whose hair matched her own exactly, nestling on her knee, expounding a picture-book to her and fair-haired Ethel, who was standing by her side; while the third baby, who had recently arrived at the crab-stage of infant evolution, was scudding over the floor in search of coals, pins, and other minerals of an interesting if indigestible character. I had caught her up in my arms, and lifted her high over my head, while she shrieked again with glee, before I said a word; but I was watching Maisie closely all the while. Before she saw Rodney she was pale, as usual, and she seemed to me somehow or other lovelier than usual, with her delicate oval face, the lips,—which it was never quite natural to her to close—parted in sweet wonder at seeing me come back, and the placid grey-brown eyes wide open. Maisie was not the girl to go out of her way in quest of picturesque effects, but Maud had cropped her hair over her forehead by main force a few days after her arrival, and the result was a framework of silky, irregular “red” locks, which heightened a sort of innocent, pleading expression her face had—“babyish,” Mike called it.

But when she saw who was with me, a great change came over her. I could not have believed her expression could change so suddenly. A wave of trouble passed, swift as light, over the tranquil baby-face, and the blood surged up into it with such boisterous violence, that I felt a pang of remorse for having startled and distressed my little sister so.

Meanwhile, Rodney King had started back with an exclamation of surprise.

"It *is*—why, can it be possible?—Miss Caird!"

Maisie set the child down on the floor, and stood up, and put out her hand; but speak, she could not, though I saw her lips move nervously.

"Only think of our meeting again—and *here*!" went on Rodney, with the same air of frank cordiality that had pleased me at first. I don't think it was wholly put on, but I think it was acquired; the result of a degree of strain and effort. "I never thought I should see you again. Are you staying here?"

"She is my wife's sister," I put in.

"Your wife? Oh, to be sure, to be sure," said Rodney, hurriedly. "I remember now, you married a Miss Caird. I never put two and two together."

"Nor did I," said Maisie, tremulously. "At least not till I saw Edie, and then I thought

you must be his brother; only he said you were in India."

"So I was, so I was," said Rodney.

"Only when we heard you had been in England a month——"

"Oh, I must explain all that. It was very strange. I couldn't *possibly* have come before, or even have let them know," rattled on the young fellow, cutting Maisie short, before she had finished her sentence; and yet, for all his haste to make excuses, he did *not* proceed to "explain all that," but, on the contrary, walked to the window and made remarks on the situation of the house, and the aspect of the place. "Difficult to say where the town ends and the suburb begins," he observed. "Oh"—turning quickly to Maisie again—"what a glorious August day it was—the day we crossed! We haven't had such a day since. It's been a stormy, blustering September. Tell me—tell me, what have you been doing all this while?"

And he sat down beside her, and bent his dark head to listen anxiously to what she might be pleased to say. It was a dangerous symptom, this exclusive attention to Maisie, and yet there was something in the frankness and *naïveté* with which he showed his preference which was reassuring.

By this time Maisie had, to a certain extent, recovered her composure, but her expression had by no means regained its normal repose. It was radiant, quick with a more vivid interest, a more keen emotion than I had ever thought to see imprinted on those calm features. By all that was romantic, she loved this handsome will-o'-the-wisp!

I am a person a little given to impulse, though I fancy nobody suspects it, and hearing Maud come in at that juncture, I threw baby down, and ran out to meet her, and impart my discovery on the spot. I must confide in somebody. I could endure the self-imposed restraint upon my tongue no longer.

Seizing Maud by the arm, and dragging her into the study, while she opened a pair of calm astonished eyes at me, I said solemnly, "It is just as I feared. Maisie *is* in love with him!"

"Gracious goodness, George! But we never anticipated *that*. We thought it might possibly have been the other way."

"*We* thought? I didn't know you'd thought at all about it."

"But, you know, we talked it over before she came."

"Before she came? But I scarcely knew of his existence then!"

“Not know of Mike’s existence?”

“*Mike!* Oh, bless your dear little dense short-sighted heart! It’s Mike’s brother I’m talking of, a handsome young officer, who is at this present moment making love to your sister in the drawing-room.”

I was striding about my den in a high state of excitement. My Highland lassie had quietly taken a seat, and was relapsing into a sternly practical view of life.

“I don’t see that there’d be any great harm done if they did take to each other,” quoth she, in a tone that implied a gentle rebuke for my gratuitous agitation. “I’m sure *I* have reason to think marriage is the happiest thing for a woman.”

Of course there was only one answer to that.

Then I told my wife a part of what made me anxious on the subject, dwelling chiefly on what we had ourselves remarked in Rodney King’s conduct: the long gaps in his correspondence; his having given no notice of his intended retirement; his long sojourn in England before communicating with the only near relations he had.

“There is something queer about him,” said Maud, pensively. “But, then, young men are careless and odd. Look how seldom Evan

writes to us ! No doubt he had a great deal to see to in London. People don't ever have any clothes, do they, that come home from India ? ”

“Never. And when they pass through Paris, where you are obliged to present a respectable appearance at the big hotels, they appear at *table d'hôte* in full evening dress borrowed from the head-waiter. As for their costume on the Boulevards——”

“I dare say he'd like a cup of tea,” interrupted Maud, calmly, referring apparently to the head-waiter.

No misgivings of mine had any effect in deterring the hospitable mistress of my house from giving the stranger her most gentle and genial welcome. As for the boys' delight when they came in, it was something delicious to see. Even Mike was not above the influence of that species of glamour which surrounds a big brother in the admiring eyes of his juniors. He hovered about him the whole evening, hung on his lips, allowed nobody else to touch his plate at supper, asking him one eager question after another about the army, which was to be his own profession. Edric, as usual, spoke less ; but it was evident that not a movement of his brother's escaped him,

and that whether he knew anything really to his discredit or no, he was a good deal impressed by his manly build, good looks, and lively, agreeable manner.

Rodney was very nice with them both, and every half-hour that passed seemed to make him more at home and happier to be with us all. I noticed one trifling circumstance at supper—that he touched nothing but water.

When we all adjourned together to the drawing-room afterwards, it amused us to see him make straight for the piano, and, with scarcely a “Do you mind?” to Maud, sit down and improvise a long rambling symphony, full of strikingly sweet phrases embedded in passages of a chaotic character, that conveyed no meaning to the ear.

But there was one person among us to whom each note was eloquent. She was so astonished at first that she dropped her work, and sat, with parted lips, gazing and listening. She was so enraptured afterwards that she rose and made a slow step or two towards the piano, and stood gazing, without a thought that we were watching her. She had scarcely self-consciousness *enough*, this simple and whole-hearted maiden.

Once I happened to glance from her rapt face

to Edie's. His eyes looked unusually large and glistening, and they were fixed upon Maisie in a way that was full of meaning. I could see that, with his rare sympathetic instinct, the boy had divined her secret.

It was natural that Rodney's first remark should be addressed to the person nearest him.

"Oh, the bliss of getting back to a piano!" he exclaimed fervently, raising his black eyes to hers with a smile that seemed to thank her for her sympathy, while his fingers still drew some last, soft lingering chords from the keys. "They wouldn't let me play on board. But an organ! Is there one here I could play on? That would be heaven! Do you think there's an organ—that anybody would mind——"

"There's our chapel organ," said Mike, eagerly. There was a better one in my church, only Mike liked to have a hand in it. "One or two of our fellows are always at it, whenever they have a chance. I'll secure it for you to-morrow morning."

"Thanks, old fellow," said Rodney, warmly.

He scarcely left the piano till —after the ladies had retired—I took him up to his "garret." When I went into Maud's room I found two people there, brushing hair in two armchairs and two very pretty dressing-gowns.

"I've been having it all out," said Maud, cheerfully, after Maisie had said good-night.

"Well?"

"Well, as usual, you've been jumping at conclusions rather quickly, darling."

"Inasmuch——"

"Inasmuch as she really has seen no more of him than she said at first. Just at Paris, and then the steamboat, and then a day at Dover."

"*Ergo*, she can't be in love with him."

"Of course not. She says she isn't."

Oh, my little wife! Did not you, too, see that she was transfigured to-night?

The next morning she came to me and said very simply that Mr. King had asked her to go with him to the organ, but that Maud was busy and could not go too. I was busy. Half a dozen of my dear poor people would be looking for me. But I could not resist the mute entreaty of her eyes, and I told her I would go with her. A message was to follow me if I was wanted.

So we set out together through the streets of garden-enclosed villas to the school-chapel, deserted, but for the woman who was dusting it, with her sleeves tucked up and her dowdy bonnet-strings flying. She had had instructions to unlock the organ, and she opened it roughly, and the rude, jarring noise resounded through

the building. But when Rodney's fingers touched the key-board, there came a kind of sigh as of human happiness too deep for utterance in speech. I could have fancied the organ had a soul to understand that her true interpreter had come at last. I am no great hand at music, but I know that he held even me spellbound, much more Maisie, who loved it—and him. There was nothing ordered about his playing. A fragment of Bach melted without any notice into a March of Mendelssohn, and that again into an Andante of Beethoven or a Minuet of Mozart. It was very erratic and unconventional. But you could see that the man's heart was in it.

Maisie would not sit down to listen. She stood all the time in the chancel behind him, with her hands crossed, and an expression of complete beatitude upon her face.

She just said breathlessly, "Oh, George!" as I passed her in the midst of a fugue to go to a seat.

"I didn't know you were so music-mad," I said, as I met her awestruck eyes.

But she answered me by casting them to the ground, and then I saw, all too clearly, that it was not the music only that was oppressing her to tears.

“Ha! A book!” Rodney exclaimed suddenly, bringing a rambling improvisation to an abrupt close. “A volume of Bach! Two volumes! I wonder if I could play one. May I try? Will you turn for me? Oh, how glad I am you love it, too!” he added eagerly, looking up at her for a moment with a bright smile as she drew nearer to him and prepared to comply with his request.

That was a lover’s speech, yet he knew that I was by. Was he very naïf or very designing, this fascinating musician?

I did not half like leaving them when, a few minutes later, my “buttons” came in to tell me that the sick man I had neglected against my conscience was worse and had sent for me. I sprang up from where I had been sitting dreaming, with my head buried in my arms, to follow him out. And lo! sitting opposite me, with his chin propped on two grimy hands and his unbrushed hair standing in all sorts of attitudes on his freckled forehead, and his big ears pushed forward—perhaps to listen better withal—Master Edric! School was over, then. The morning had flown.

I don’t believe the boy so much as saw me as I passed down the chancel between him and those two at the organ. He was drinking them

in with an intensity of fixed attention like Maisie's for the music—like my baby's for the first snow-flakes that she saw fall. I did not notice him; but I observed on the desk before him a little bunch of violets, which, when we all assembled at early dinner, reappeared in Maisie's dress.

III.

DURING the first few days that Rodney King was in our house, he and Michael were inseparable out of school hours; but, after that, the violent friendship somewhat cooled. Mike began to resume his independent ways, and seemed to me to get a little bit shy of his brother, as boys (herein strangely resembling certain of their four-footed brethren) will of anything they do not quite understand. It looked as though Rodney had disappointed him—failed to come up to his ideal of a soldier. What was he to make of a fellow who preferred the organ and the piano to “anything sensible,” *i.e.* shooting, football, or bicycling, and dangled about the women all day, when he might have enjoyed the illustrious society of those demi-gods of the sixth form, Long Major, Morris,

or Majoribanks? Ill health, on account of which apparently he had left the army, might account for a great deal; still there was a something——

We all of us, but one, felt the vague force of that—that *thought-stroke*, as I believe the Germans call it. It was impossible to say that Rodney was actually mystifying, was not straightforward and aboveboard in all his doings; and yet I, for one, apart from all recollection of Edric's innuendoes, was never without a dim sense of something in his character, his history, his habits, which was being concealed from me, and that sense I imagine that Michael, in a different and probably more unconscious way, shared with me.

The last time that he ever made an attempt to monopolize his brother was on a certain Saturday, a whole holiday, which he had been plotting for days past to spend with a cousin of mine, who had some tolerable shooting in the neighbourhood. Jack Armytage liked him, and had given him a general invitation for all holidays, so that even when there was no shooting he would go over for racquets or lawn-tennis with Jack and his boys. He had set his heart on Rodney accompanying him on this occasion, and Rodney had consented to go, though evidently rather against the grain.

“Look here, I hope it won’t knock you up,” I heard Mike, who was cleaning his gun in the lobby, remark to him somewhere about seven a.m. “I fancy it’s some time since you’ve encountered the British turnip-field!”

“Oh, make your mind easy, old man,” said Rodney, with a jerk, as if he was pulling on his boots. But it was rather a spurious enthusiasm in his tone, I thought, as I went to see after their breakfast. And he was looking as unhealthy an “Indian” as ever as he sat down to it, far more fit to stay at home and stroll about with the women than to set out for a long day’s shooting.

Whereas Michael’s spirits rose in visible proportion to every fresh mouthful of cold beef.

“I say, we shall bring home a jolly good bag to-day! Tell Auntie she may look forward to a reduced butcher’s bill next week! Such a crack shot as ex-Lieutenant Rodney King and your humble servant put together! *Væ victis!* Which being interpreted is, ‘Woe unto the partridges of Mr. John Armytage.’ Are you ready? Train at eight, sharp!”

And with that he was gone, his brother following more slowly, and smiling in an irresolute manner at his sallies.

But Michael’s return was something very

different from Michael's departure. He came in by himself about tea-time, looking for the first time in his life crestfallen and sulky. I had often seen him in a towering passion, recovering himself the next moment, and roaring with *bonâ fide* laughter at any absurdity that tickled him. To-night he was moody, reserved, snappish. It took us some time to extort any account of the day's adventures and the reason of Rodney's non-appearance. At length we made out that there must have been some sort of quarrel, or, to be within the mark, some difference between them. Rodney had been clumsy. Mike supposed he had forgotten the etiquette of shooting, as it was understood in England, at any rate. Anyhow, he had got where he had no business to be, and it was no fault of his (Michael's) that he had grazed, just grazed, Rodney's shoulder, if he would get in the light and behave like a great——

I don't know why Michael pulled up there, unless it was that he saw a white face opposite him grow whiter than it had ever looked before, and heard a suppressed gasp of terror.

I saw him knit his brows and try to control himself; but it was no good. That very horror-struck face urged him to speak.

“Of course you think me a brute—you

women don't know—of course you think I ought to be full of sorrow and grief and apologies," he blurted out, wounded to the quick, poor laddie, by the terrible imputation of perilous blundering which was hanging over his manliness. "I tell you it was a mere nothing, a pin's point. I should have apologized fast enough if he'd behaved like a gentleman; but he chose to chaff me for my clumsiness, though everybody saw it was his fault, and said so. Why, he went on shooting! I couldn't stand it. I hate that sort of thing. I came home. Talk of fun! Where is he? I don't know where he is. He'll find his own way home when he's done spoiling a good day's sport——"

At which point Michael found out that he was fairly working himself into a rage, and had the good sense to withdraw, biting his lip and banging all the doors that intervened, to his own apartment.

I followed him there for a little quiet talk. I tried to make him tell me more about the accident, and to discover how it happened, that if it was really so trivial, it had not been passed over with ordinary good sense and good nature. But I could get nothing out of him, except that Rodney had succeeded in displeasing him;

that he couldn't "make the fellow out;" that it was not so much anything particular he had said as——

That Michael paused and hesitated there did credit to his generosity. I guessed what he would have added, had not brotherly loyalty checked him. I saw that he was repenting already of those hot words in the drawing-room, and did not care to let even me, in private, know that he considered that Rodney, the beloved, the revered, the admired, had behaved like a sneak.

I comforted him as best I could. I have found nothing sadder in life than the dethronement of one's idols of eighteen, and it went to my heart to see the gradual process of disillusion thus rudely clinched. Only I knew that I should hear Mike whistling Strauss or Offenbach as he bounded off to school next morning.

There was another, who, when *her* day for disillusion came, would need more comforting.

What could I do for *her*?

Rodney King had been with us nearly a fortnight, nor had any decent opportunity offered for hinting at his departure. He had taken Maud captive with his music, and his courteous, pleasant ways; and she would

not see that there was anything between him and Maisie, or, if there was, that any harm would come of it. He had entreated over and over again to be told if he was trespassing on us; but the days had slipped by, and, what with compassion for his lonely condition and the absence of any proof that my surmises as to his character were well-founded, I had taken no decisive steps to dislodge him.

But when I left Michael that evening, I went straight to my study, and despatched an invitation to an old college friend to come and see me as early as he could the following week.

On re-entering the drawing-room to tell Maud what I had done, I found her alone. A note had come for Edric from Rodney, begging him to go and see him at once at the Imperial.

"It frightened Maisie so!" added Maud, who looked rather alarmed herself. "She says he must be badly hurt."

"He, or his temper?" I said. "No, no. The two have had a quarrel. Mike's been telling me. He'll be here directly with Edie, you'll see."

But the evening wore on, and the brothers did not appear. The night-school had begun, and I had to go out, after an early supper;

but when I came back—no Rodney, no Edric! I began to grow uneasy myself, and towards eleven o'clock I set off to walk down to the Imperial, and see for myself what was up. I had not, however, got well into the town when a small figure ran against me under a lamp post.

“Uncle! Stop!”

“Hullo, Edie! Well, what's happened? Have you been doctoring a serious gunshot wound, or patching up a slight difference of opinion?”

I could not see the boy's face as we turned homewards together in the dark, but I detected a strange alteration in his voice as he answered hurriedly, “No, no; neither. He's knocked up, regularly knocked up. He was faint, he says, when he passed the Imperial on his way home, and went in for some food. He's got a bed there, just for to-night. He'll be up to-morrow. I'm going for him to-morrow.”

“But it's odd,” I muttered, puzzled by Edric's efforts to reassure me. Was it that he was too inexperienced to know how serious the degree of exhaustion must be which could prevent a man driving a distance something over a mile? “But the wound, Edric! It must have been the wound. Are you certain that was nothing?”

“Positive, uncle. The skin was scarcely grazed. Oh, he’s all right; he’ll be all right. I promised him you shouldn’t go down, and that nobody should make a fuss,” said Edie, going straight to the point with schoolboy candour. But what was that? Was it a tremble in his voice?

“I can’t conceive how he and Mike came to such grief,” I remarked, after a pause.

No rejoinder from Edie.

“There seems to have been nothing in the world to quarrel about.”

Still silence.

“I left Mike as sore about it as ever.”

“Did you?” said Edie, quickly. “Oh, I think I can explain——” There he stopped short.

It was only after an interval of two or three minutes that he went on in a quick, nervous way that reminded me of his brother. “Mike doesn’t know. They’d just been lunching; and Rodney says he can’t bear anything after a long fast, or much of anything at any time, and that’s why he never touches anything hardly. And there was that Captain Forsyth, you know. And he was awfully thirsty, and he’d swallowed a whole lot before he knew how strong it was. And he told me it was as much

as ever he could do to stand it. And it was soon after that it happened ; and if he did slang Mike a little he's most awfully sorry, and I'm going to tell Mike and make it all square."

At that point I felt in the darkness a small bony arm steal into mine.

"Yes ; but I don't like such extreme exhaustion. What does that mean ?" I said sternly, without any particular reference to my special pleader and his oration.

And once more I got no answer.

I strongly suspected that the true reason of Rodney's keeping away was the difficulty of facing Michael till his conduct, which had probably been worse than we thought, had been explained.

"I see now why Rodney never touches wine," I said, half to myself, as Edie and I entered the sleeping house together by means of my latch-key. The lights were all out, except one solitary gas-jet, and we lowered our voices to a whisper as we lit our candles by it. But as we stood there poking the recalcitrant wicks, which don't light easily when one's eyes are dazzled, into the flame, somebody emerged as quietly as a ghost out of the dark drawing-room—so quietly—and said not a word, only raised a pair of very sad, red, questioning eyes to my face.

"What! You up still, my Maisie? These dissipated ways are not allowed in my house. Come to bed, directly!" And I passed my arm through hers, and led her up the dark staircase, from a sort of vague feeling about sheltering those red eyes. As I went, I whispered to her that there had been no accident at all, and that we should see our guest as well as ever he was to-morrow morning.

But I need not have been so solicitous to shield the maiden sensitiveness, which I had fancied must shrink from even Edie's sympathetic gaze. For she had put an arm round Edie's neck, and she was holding her candle high up, so that its full light fell on her face, as she lingered about her door, and said firmly—

"But why hasn't he come home to-night?"

"A quarrel—a boys' quarrel with Michael. It will be all right to-morrow," I said.

But my word was not enough for her.

"Is that all, Edie?" she asked, stooping over the boy.

Again that odd, unaccountable pause before Edie answered with a flaming face, "Yes, that's all."

Then there was another pause, after which there came some simple words that somehow made one glad to be standing in the shadow.

"I'm very thankful," Maisie said.

I think that my sister-in-law was one of those people who remain to the end of their lives just what God made them. They take heed of purity, because He made them pure; but of conventionality, a merely human thing, they take no heed. They have not room for more than one idea, but commonly it is a divine idea; and when they love, they show it.

I was proceeding to undress, thus musing, when Edric's voice came in a loud whisper through the key-hole.

"May I come in, uncle?"

"Come in, my boy."

"Look here, you won't say anything to *her* about that—that *luncheon business*?" said Edie, timidly.

"Why not?" I asked, having my own reasons. I own to the ignominy of partially disappearing into a cupboard as I put my home question.

"Oh, well, because you see, don't you know——" stammered Edie.

"She won't think the worse of him, any more than you or I do," said I, cheerfully, from the recesses of the cupboard.

Edie took some minutes to reflect before making his next speech. Then, with a grave

and composed air, as of a judge delivering his charge to a breathless jury on a case of the profoundest import, thus Master Edric, "If she were you or I, or anybody like that, that would be different; but when you care tremendously for a person, you know, I should think that hearing those sort of things about them would make them rather—uncomfortable, you know."

"It looks uncommonly as if you'd been prying into a lady's secrets, Edie," I said, emerging from the cupboard. But Edie had fled. How could any one stay for so much as "Good-night," after deliberately announcing that a young lady "cared tremendously" for a gentleman who had not proposed to her?

There comes back to me now, in the light of what happened afterwards, some more talk Edie and I had the next day. It was after church, as we were walking together townwards to meet Rodney.

It chanced that at the time my thoughts were busy with "parish," and that I did not speculate upon the context of my companion's question, when he suddenly said, "Uncle, do you think it's any worse *telling* a lie than *acting* one?"

“Not a bit,” I said, still thinking less of Edric than of how I should propitiate the old lady who had called me popish for putting my choir into surplices.

Presently Edie spoke again.

“Uncle, I always think about Rahab, you know, and the spies, and what St. Paul says—I mean, if a good man like St. Paul praised her for telling a lie——”

“Then lying may be right sometimes, as killing is?” I finished for him. “It’s a knotty point in casuistry, Edie, and one much more easily dismissed than settled.”

I am afraid that I was thinking aloud rather than seeking to edify Edric, as I went on, musingly, “There was a hen-ptarmigan I saw once on the Alps, near Mürren. I wonder now if that bird was very depraved. I feel certain she would have told a lie if she could. As it was, she acted one by shamming wounded, and I was in full pursuit, when I came upon the nest of little fluffy balls she had deliberately tried to decoy me away from. Now, do you think that all your nonsense about motherhood——”

“Hullo!” said Rodney, turning a corner, and running into our arms. He did not seem more ill than usual, nor was there any

change in his manner as he apologized for having disturbed the household the night before and raised an unnecessary alarm. He and Michael had had a bit of a row; and then he had been horribly "out of sorts;" and then, another thing was, he really had trespassed on my hospitality long enough, and, if I didn't mind, he thought he would get his traps moved to the Imperial that afternoon, and take up his abode there for the present. He should see just as much of us, only not be a burden, etc., etc. "This chap can be our postman, and let me know now and then when I can come," wound up Rodney, laying his hand affectionately on Edric's shoulder.

I was fain to acquiesce in the arrangement, though in my secret heart I could have wished that, for the present, at any rate, my young friend's quarters had been transferred a little further than to the Imperial. I told him that in point of fact we should probably have had to ask for his room in a day or two. I did not ask him to go back with us to dinner, but he took the invitation for granted, saying something about "packing up," and "begging the ladies' pardon for giving them a fright." And so it came to pass that we found ourselves once more sitting down together to the midday

meal—the same party ; but with, who shall say, what new sensations, in the breast of each ? Never was I more thankful to Maud than on that occasion, for her faculty of saying whatever had to be said in spite of all latent commotion. She sent word to the cook that tea would be half an hour earlier, as though Michael were not sitting at her left hand in embarrassed silence ; reproved Ethel for eating her meat with two spoons, as though Rodney were not trying to make equally embarrassed conversation on her right ; remarked to me that it was time to be thinking about the heating apparatus in church, as though Maisie had not been sending every dish untasted away from very excess of joy and thankfulness.

But after dinner, I waylaid Maud, and said to her, “ Look here, you and I are going to school. I’m not going to leave those two alone.”

“ Michael must take him out for a walk,” said Maud, turning back, as she spoke, to the dining-room, where the rest were lingering.

“ You’ll like a walk with Michael and Majoribanks ? ” she said, with astounding *sang froid* to Rodney, who caught at the opportunity for propitiating his brother.

“ If Michael will let me ; if he’s quite sure I shan’t be in the way,” he answered quickly.

Mike hastened to reassure him upon that point. He, too, was glad to show that he bore no grudge.

So that I started for school with an easy mind, and when I came back went straight to the study without inquiring whether the "gentlemen" had come in. Judge of my surprise to find the eldest "gentleman" in my thinking-chair, holding a young lady by both hands, a slender, sweet lady, who was bending over him as a tall-stalked lily bends in a garden-bed. Perhaps he thought he could see her face best so. Perhaps it did not occur to him to offer the seat, being one of those who, by a second nature, take their ease in small things as in great, leave their affairs to Chancery, and their domestic worries to their wives. At any rate, it seemed as though he had been resting there some time, and she standing there, asking only to be allowed to stand, and watch, and ward, and be his good genius and guardian angel for evermore.

And yet, after all, I was not surprised, only shocked, struck with a quick pain at the heart, to think that sweet Maisie had given herself beyond recall to this man, who, with whatsoever gifts and graces he might be endowed, was yet undoubtedly not worthy of one so sterling, true,

and selfless—was, if not erring—unstable, weak, and preoccupied with self. I had foreseen it. I had tried in vain to avert it. But do the crises of life hurt us the less for being foreseen, the disenchantments, the partings, the deaths?

There were no misgivings upon Maisie's face, as she turned it to me then. It was scarcely rosier than usual. It had all the calm of secure and settled happiness. And there was no excitement in her voice, only a thrill of gladness, as she smiled and said, "George, we've been waiting here to tell you."

"I know you look upon her as a sister," said Rodney, springing up, and seizing my hand nervously. "I do hope you'll get to look upon me as a brother. I wish to be a brother to you. You've been so good to me. I don't know what you and Mrs. Armytage will say to me, wanting to get married, when I've got nothing to do; but she says she doesn't mind beginning—we've been agreeing, haven't we?—that we can begin upon a few hundreds, and, in the meantime, this wine business—I feel sure my cousin will be able to arrange something, he said so much about the opening when I was in town."

"Or Evan would get him something to do,"

put in Maisie, timidly, with an inquiring look at me that said, "Why do you say nothing, and why do you look so grave?"

Oh, Maisie! Maisie! If it had been only the loaves and fishes!

"I am not afraid of that," I said, with what cheerfulness I might. "A willing pair of hands is sure to find work; and a dinner of herbs that a loving man and wife sit down to is better than a stalled ox in solitude."

I think we were all of us glad when that tempestuous Sunday came to a close. I took upon myself to send Rodney back to his hotel in good time, that we might have our usual half-hour's hymn-singing before going to bed. I thought it would soothe and quiet us all, and that Maisie would sleep the better for it. When it was over, Maud lingered on for a little while at the piano, playing Handel; while Maisie sat down with her hands in her lap and shut her eyes; and the boys, like birds of prey, seized upon their books.

Presently came Edric's voice, sounding loud over the gentle playing, and addressing that impersonal oracle who presides over the room where a boy is reading to himself, "I say, I always forget which the starboard side of a ship is!"

“The best side for seeing the stars from, of course,” said Edie’s light-minded uncle from his armchair.

Edie wriggled.

Then she, of the ruddy locks and few ideas, in dreamy cadence, as she opened her eyes dreamily, “How can that be, when the stars are all over the sky?”

IV.

THE wedding was fixed for January.

In the interval Christ Church Vicarage was, naturally, a good deal frequented by Mr. Rodney King. Our friends began to take a great deal of kind notice of him, and he was often included in evening invitations. I say evening advisedly, for our good neighbours, many of them half-pay officers, maiden ladies, widows bringing up families of boys on small incomes, etc., did not give dinners, but asked one “to spend the evening”—a phrase which, in the case of agreeable people, implied the utmost pleasantness which simplicity and sense can afford, and in that of dull ones, merely negus and sandwiches, and sitting in a frigid circle listening to the scraping of a fiddle.

One day in November there came a note from a certain Mrs. Lorry, a rather well-to-do old lady, who lived alone, asking us to one of these "evenings." She trusted Miss Caird's *fiancée* would be of the party, although she had not the pleasure of his acquaintance. She had heard of his musical talent, and if he would waive ceremony, and do her the honour, she would esteem it a great kindness.

"I may say you will go on the 12th, Rodney?" said Maud, who was scribbling at her writing-table, without looking up.

"The 12th? I've no engagement. But where?"

"Mrs. Lorry's. There's her note. Didn't I tell you she had asked you?"

Rodney took up the note and read it through before he answered.

"Lorry—that isn't a common name," he said, half to himself.

"You know some one of that name?" I asked.

"Oh yes! There was a Lorry in my bat—in the Artillery, I knew a little," he said, correcting himself hastily.

"The Artillery? Why, that's 'the Major,' of course!" said Mike, who had come in in the middle of the conversation.

“Do you know him?” asked Rodney, turning quickly round to his brother.

“We all know a good deal about him,” said Mike. “So would you, if you were in the room three minutes with the old lady. Nobody’s seen him in the flesh, because he hasn’t had any leave since she came to live here; but I believe he’s coming home soon, when I believe she expects the town to be illuminated. Oh yes! It’s always ‘the Major’ would say this, or ‘the Major’ used to do the other. She’s mighty proud of *having a Major*.”

“The man I know isn’t a Major,” muttered Rodney. He had turned his back to us, and was looking out of window, pulling at his moustache.

“Well, I’m glad you can go,” said Maud, scribbling on placidly.

But it happened strangely enough, on the morning of the 12th, when we were expecting Rodney to luncheon, that he remembered an engagement for that evening, and sent us a note to say that we should not see him till the middle of the following day. Would we make his excuses to Mrs. Lorry?

And it happened still more strangely that we did not see Rodney in the middle of the following day, nor did he send us word or sign till it

grew dark, and the boys came in from school with a sharp, "Where's Rodney?" that involuntarily reminded one of a miserable day six weeks ago. When we told them that we had seen nothing of him, Mike gave a low whistle, and took up a paper; Edric started, and I saw his eyes dilate with a kind of terror. He stood perfectly still for a few seconds, then made a bolt to the door.

"I *don't* want any tea," he said, plaintively, so as to forestall the inevitable remonstrances from "Auntie." It was my habit to allow these fellows a larger measure of liberty than would have been possible had they been less affectionate, upright, and honourable, and on that occasion I did not so much as say, "Where are you going?" For one thing, I knew very well without asking.

But long after Edric had rushed out of the house to fly to his brother, I was haunted by a vision of his face, with its white, aghast features, and wide-open, terror-struck eyes. It brought forcibly back to my mind, what I had half forgotten, that he knew more than we did about Rodney; that all this time, ever since the midsummer holidays, in fact, he had been travelling with some secret concerning him which he had not been at liberty to divulge,

but which had always oppressed him, and now and then, as to-night, had caused him the acutest agony. What could it be? I blamed myself for not having ascertained sooner. I resolved that I would delay to ascertain no longer. And suddenly, as I was pondering the thing alone in the stillness of my study, a light flashed across my mind. Shall I say a light, or a chill shadow from the outer darkness? I seemed to see the truth, in all its blackness, with a certainty from which there was no appeal. Dull, deaf, and blind, that I had not suspected it before! Everything had pointed to it. Each effort of memory confirmed it.

It was nine o'clock before Edric came in. When I heard his step, I called him into the study. If my voice sounded stern—well it was not sternness that made it sound so, but Edric must have feared I was annoyed, for he began, “Oh, uncle, I shall have lots of time for ‘prep’——” before I had said another word.

But I stopped him by just laying my hand on his shoulder, and looking into his face.

“Edric, your brother is intemperate,” I said slowly and gravely.

His eyes dropped to the ground, but he said nothing.

"I demand the truth of you," I went on. "He is to marry Maud's sister, my sister, one of the sweetest women that ever blessed a man with love. Her happiness or misery are at stake. She must not marry a——"

I paused; for I saw Edric's head droop lower, and his lip begin to quiver.

I took his hands in mine.

"My boy, if you can deny it; if you can tell me that I am mistaken, and that it is not true, you do not know how I shall thank and bless you. For to be told that he is unworthy of her now; to be told she must give him up now—I think it is no figure of speech to say that it will break her heart."

We seemed to hear our own hearts beat, as I waited for Edric's answer. Presently came a gentle footstep overhead, and then the sound of Maud's voice singing her restless baby to sleep.

"Birdie, rest a little longer,
Till the little wings are stronger,"

sang Maud, as I knew by the tune. Then silence, except for the tramp, tramp of those unwearying feet.

"Well, Edie?" I said.

He disengaged his hands from mine with a sudden jerk, rushed to the door, and said in a

curiously loud defiant tone, yet with the tears he was struggling so manfully to keep back, in his voice, "I *do* deny it, and you *are* mistaken, and it is *not* true."

After which no frightened rabbit ever scuttled into its hole so fast as Edric flew to his own room, there, I verily believe, to throw himself down on the floor, and weep as only a boy of fifteen, who has the making of a great man in him, can weep.

I welcomed Rodney the next morning with open arms. I took him aside to tell him that a fresh attack of illness grieved me; that he should consult a London physician; that things must not go on so, or he would get worse instead of better, and be laid up on his wedding-day.

He admitted that he was not making the progress he had expected, and that, perhaps, if he did not improve, advice might be desirable.

"But I shall try a spell of change of air first," he added, taking a letter from his pocket and handing it to me. "I should like a ride with the hounds over the Sussex Downs. And you see, I should be able to combine business with pleasure. It looks promising about that wine concern. You advise me to go, don't you?"

“By all means,” I said; “and I am not half sorry that now we shall have the boys at home for Christmas.”

For the letter was from that distant cousin of the Kings with whom they now and then spent the holidays. He had not been able to give them a home, owing to unfortunate domestic circumstances, and it was not without a degree of reluctance that I allowed them to visit him at all. He was an easy-tempered, but not very high-minded man of the world; and the atmosphere of his bachelor-household, with its living but absent mistress, was not the best imaginable for boys in their teens. The invitation to Rodney was the result of a correspondence on the subject of a business for him. The writer, good-naturedly, wished to bring him and the friend he hoped to prevail upon to take him into partnership together. He hoped Rodney would come early in December, and stay over Christmas. He wanted to get to know him better himself. He could place a couple of hunters at his disposal. Mr. King concluded with a polite postponement of the two younger brothers' proposed visit till the Easter holidays.

“Make him go on the 1st,” said Maud to me, when she heard of the invitation.

“Why?”

“Because Maisie has had a good deal taken out of her, and will be better for a rest.”

“But to part lovers!”

“Part fiddlesticks,” said ruthless Maud. But she carried her point, and on the 1st of December, Rodney, having been persuaded that it was for Maisie’s good as well as his own, took leave of us for a month.

And so Christmas drew near.

Merry Christmas! Is that what it should be called in this nineteenth century? Sweet and solemn it is still to some of us; but *merry*, with so many hearts in heaviness concerning it, so many spirits in doubt?

There is always to me something especially repugnant in the spasm of factitious gaiety which breaks out in shop-windows with the beginning of December. There is a mercenary insincerity about it which offends me; and I would have it put down by Act of Parliament, if it did not please the children. Oh, the children! What is the garish grocer to them but a public benefactor? And who do they love better than the disinterested purveyor of humbug in the form of Christmas cards?

But, come, I am not the misanthrope I seem, and the proof is that I went down into the town with Maisie to buy the missive that was to

carry her good wishes into Sussex—and also to make a trifling investment on my own account in the same line.

Well, well, do I remember that morning! The ground was crisp, and the air was crisp, and brought the roses into Maisie's cheek as she walked by my side. I remember we talked about Edric.

"I must get dear Edie a card," my companion said. "He is so very good to me. He seems to try and make up for Rodney's absence all he can."

"I wish he looked stronger, and were not so preternaturally quiet," I murmured. "I cannot conceive what ails him."

I did not wish Maisie to hear. But, then, Maisie, even when she had nobody in Sussex to think about, seldom heard what was being said till some one woke her by talking loud or addressing her by name.

"He is so very tender to me," she said, merely echoing herself.

The great bookseller for whose shop we were bound, was like the rest of his fellow-tradesmen, a doubly important man at Christmas-time. Business was so brisk when we went in, that we were some time getting attended to. I was turning over some cards for the children when

I caught my own name, and saw that two gentlemen at my elbow were looking at a volume of my sermons.

"By the way, I must hear him to-morrow. He's here, isn't he?" said one.

"What that heretic, Armytage?" said his friend. "So he is."

At that point I made a dive through a cluster of children to Maisie's side.

"That gentleman called me a heretic," I whispered indignantly to my sister-in-law.

No reply from Maisie. She was entirely absorbed in the sixpenny work of art which she had chosen for Rodney. I had had no intention of prying into her secrets. But how could I help myself? I had run to her in self-defence, and I was obliged to look at something. Well, Maisie's Christmas card was a cross, a brown cross, with white lilies clustering round it, and twined between the lilies and the cross this legend,

"Je meurs où je m'attache."

"Why, Miss Caird! Mr. Armytage! How d'ye do?" said an old lady's treble in our ears. We had never been greeted so cordially by old Mrs. Lorry before, and as we turned round to shake hands with her I found out why.

There at her elbow stood that glorious possession of hers, the Major, having, I suppose, recently arrived from India, and looking, poor man, as if he was already heartily tired of having the town illuminated for him, and being introduced to his mother's extensive circle of acquaintances. He was a tall, thin man, with a fair moustache, and a lazy—not an affected—drawl.

“I wanted you to see my son, Mr. Armytage. I've only had him a very few days, or I should have brought him to call upon Mrs. Armytage,” chatted on the poor old woman in undisguised pride and delight over her Major. “Why, Henry, you are going to lunch at the Wilmots'; you can walk back with Mr. Armytage. I must get home. Is the carriage there, Henry dear?”

And off she bustled, after compelling, as it were, the tired Major and my exceedingly pre-occupied self to foregather.

“The Wilmots are our next-door neighbours'; we shall have the pleasure of your company?” I was obliged to say to him as we were starting, and he was loafing by the door, not liking to set off without us.

I had to do most of the talking on the way, as I had foreseen.

As we got near home it struck me that I

had not worked that usually prolific vein of common acquaintance.

"I believe you are in the Artillery?" I began. "Mr. Rodney King——"

"What, do you know him?" interrupted Major Lorry, with an odd sort of smile. "Is that Rodney St. John?"

"We know Rodney St. John King just a little," I said, with a look at Maisie, which I fancy he misunderstood.

"What, you do? He's turned up here, eh? I should have thought he'd have been a little shy about showing himself at home."

If the slow, quiet words had been a thunder clap, they could not have made my heart beat faster. Man-like, I could not collect myself sufficiently to speak; but a calm, steady voice beside me broke the silence.

"Why?"

"Oh, if you know the young man you must know why," said the Major again, with that ironical smile. "I fancy it isn't possible to know him very well without finding out that he's afflicted with a complaint known to ears polite as dipsomania."

I stole a glance at Maisie then, and saw the colour forsaking her lips. But she still had more control over them than I had over mine,

for, as I slipped my arm through hers, she forced them to say, "That means drinking, doesn't it?"

"Well, it means aristocratic drinking, just as certain varieties of speculation mean aristocratic stealing," drawled the Major, obviously a little amused by this grave grey-eyed innocent. "But Rodney St. John—Rodney St. John slightly over-stepped the correct limit. Oh, you know," he added, rousing himself, and speaking more seriously, "the fellow was a disgrace to the Service. His retirement was well-timed, I can tell you. I can assure you that in a very few days it would have been a case of her Majesty having no further occasion for his services."

What might have happened if we had not been standing at our own gate at that moment, I do not know. I scarcely know how we shook hands with him, or managed to utter the usual civilities. I cannot even tell how Maisie looked. I felt rather than saw her hasten past me into the house and run upstairs—a thing she seldom did. I felt rather than heard the servant trying to make me understand that some one was waiting to see me on business in the study. I entered it mechanically, and looked at the man vacantly.

But while he was telling me his business, I began to feel very thankful to him for the length of time he appeared likely to occupy, and the excuse he would make for my non-appearance in the dining-room.

"Bring some wine and biscuits here, and tell Mrs. Armytage not to wait dinner for me," I said to the maid; and I and my prosy visitor, whom my hospitality astonished not a little, sat down together to bumpers of sherry and an interminable discussion, which I did my best to encourage him to spin out, about nothing at all.

Dinner had been over some time when he left me. And now what should I do?

Tell Maud? or comfort Maisie? or have it out with Edric?

While I stood irresolute, Maud appeared at the door.

"My darling, what is the matter with you?" gasped my dear little wife, starting back in alarm. "What do you look so haggard for?"

"Have you seen Maisie?" I asked.

"Yes; Maisie has been at dinner. But there's something wrong with her. She wouldn't eat anything. I came to ask you what it was."

"Fancy her coming to dinner at all! Fancy

her being able to keep it from you, and not breaking down before the children! She has heard something this morning that will bring her engagement to an end. I am surprised. I thought it would have broken her heart."

"But tell me—tell me," cried Maud, as she clung to me, beginning to sob already in her fright and distress. She was weeping very bitterly by the time I had done; but, like herself, she could not help viewing the situation practically, even from behind a blinding veil of tears, and she sobbed out to me that though it was terrible for Maisie—terrible—terrible—still we ought to be very, very thankful we hadn't found it out too late. "Go and tell her so, George. Do go and tell her that, and everything else you can think of, to comfort her," sobbed Maud. "You can be calm and—and—*you know*; and she thinks so much of all you say. I heard her in the drawing-room with the children."

"I'll go and get her for a talk," I said; but I had to pray hard for the calmness I was supposed to possess a double portion of—one natural, the other professional—as I went.

However, Maisie was not in the drawing-room. Probably she had made over the children to Edric's care. Anyhow he was in sole charge

of them, keeping them all three, as he always did, in a high state of frolic and good-humour. In a general way there was nothing I loved better than to see Edric with the babies. Far from discouraging his spending his half-holidays in the nursery, I sought to foster to the uttermost that vein of delicate tenderness in his character which Maud sometimes feared would develop into effeminacy. Have not earth's strongest and most gifted ones, from

“ Our Euripedes the human,
With his droppings of warm tears,”

down to my great and dear master, Charles Kingsley, had more than a touch of woman in them?

It went hard with me to frown on Edric then, the son of my heart, whom I loved so well, partly perhaps because I had been granted no man-child of my own. But I had to hush the shouts and merriment and the exquisite ripples of baby laughter that come before speech, and seem the sweeter for that, and to send the trio upstairs, and desire Edric to remain. I had something to say to him.

“ You have been deceiving me, Edric,” I said, not reproachfully, but very sadly, when we were alone together.

A spasm of pain passed over his face, and he began to stammer something I could not hear.

"I have heard your brother's history from a brother-officer of his," I went on quietly. "My worst suspicions are confirmed. Why did you leave me in the dark? You know I believe in you, Edric. You know that even now I believe your strange conduct to have been actuated by the best motives. But surely, surely it has been *mistaken* conduct. Surely you have erred grievously in concealing all this from *me*."

"Oh, uncle!" cried poor Edric, piteously, taking hold of my arm, and yet trying to turn his face away from me, "don't, don't look so sorry. You don't know what it's been hiding it up from you. It's been the worst of everything. But I couldn't—how could I?—tell you what I heard at Cousin Tom's. I didn't tell one soul except Butler; and then, when he came home and was so nice, I did hope he was all right. I always cared for him so much. He was so jolly to me when I was a little kid—always sending me Indian toys and things. I did hope——"

"But when *her* happiness became involved," I said, as he stopped to get his breath.

“Ah! but it was too late,” said Edric, quickly; and this time he glanced up at me fearlessly, almost proudly. “She cared for him before he ever came into this house, don’t you see? and what you said yourself was perfectly true: you said yourself that if it was broken off it would break her heart.”

“And you thought, if I knew——”

“Oh, I did promise Rodney nobody should know. He said, if he was once married to her, he knew he should be all right. He shouldn’t be able to help himself, he said. Oh, do please forget about that! I did try to act for the best. You know what you told me about the spies and the ptarmigan, and untruths and deception, and all that?” pleaded my poor bewildered laddie, with a confused recollection of what he had heard me say more than once concerning the *suppressio veri* and the *suggestio falsi*—how there was no difference between them, and how they were both sinful if employed, as they oftenest are, for evil; both righteous when they defend the truth, protect the feeble, and uphold the good.

“But, child, child, you know not what you say!”

I had let go his hand, and was pacing the

room in deeper perturbation of spirit than he knew.

"You thought he might be cured by marrying her. He thought so. No doubt he thought so—thinks so—sincerely. Heaven forbid I should judge him for that thought, the truest and purest, perhaps, he ever had. But I am sadly afraid that this is not ordinary dissipation, born of neglect and ignorance and mimicry of older men, such as loving a good woman stops, nine times out of ten. I fear this is radical, deepseated—no, not vice—not vice—disease—constitutional, probably congenital infirmity. Oh Edric, Edric, if I could but be quite certain this blow will not wreck her life!"

Again Edric came up very close to me and hung on to my arm. For some minutes he could not trust himself to speak; but as we heard in the silence some one coming downstairs, and crossing the hall in the direction of the drawing-room, he gave me one imploring look, and whispered, "*Call me Edie.*"

"George, I thought we were to go to the alms-houses," said Maisie, glancing from my face to Edric's in some astonishment. She had her hat on ready to go out. Her lips were

still pale, but her brow was placid as ever, and her voice quite steady.

"And so we will, dear, if you wish it. Just go and see if Mike's in, Edie, old fellow."

For the boy had been standing looking vacantly at Maisie, unable to guess by her face whether she knew or not.

"Were you talking about *it*?" asked Maisie, simply, meeting my bewildered gaze with complete unconsciousness.

"Oh, Maisie, he has known it all the while!"

"Dear Edie! He tried to spare me," she said, after a pause, with a sweet silvery thrill in her voice, as she sat down, loosening her warm wrap a little. "I'm glad he didn't tell me."

Then she gave a little sigh.

I was encouraged by her calmness to try and remember something of what Maud had enjoined me to say to comfort her, and yet I could only begin again, "Oh, Maisie! Now that it's all over——"

"Now that *what* is all over?" asked Maisie, opening her eyes wide.

I stared in my turn.

"Why, your engagement, my poor sweet Maisie——"

Then Maisie's brows contracted a little, as

they did when she was paining herself to understand the many things in our complex life that were too wonderful for her.

“*Over?* My engagement *over?*” she repeated—stupidly, Mike would have said.

But while I stood beside her speechless, myself, in my surprise, I saw that gradual smile of hers, that seemed her spirit coming back from the far country where it sojourned, slowly overspread her face.

“Oh George! You never thought—surely, you didn’t think, for a moment, that I should *give him up?* Doesn’t he want me all the more now, to help him, and take care of him? Oh, I think—I mean, I hope, I trust, I can help him to be a good man. Chronic? Constitutional?” repeated Maisie, her face growing troubled again as I tried gently, very gently, to show her the madness of staking her future on the chance of his reform. “You think he’ll always be what he is? Then”—here Maisie stood up, folded her hands together, and raised her eyes, not to mine, but to some far off glory that she saw—“Then *I* will always be his friend; I will be his true, true, loving wife.”

And she meant it so utterly, that before a

week had passed we had been compelled, from sheer despair of moving her, to say, "so be it," Maud and I.

It was a choice between that and breaking her heart.

The agony of standing by to see such a sacrifice made by our sister, as perhaps never woman made before, was, however, to some extent allayed by the extraordinary effect which it had upon Rodney King. He was told all; and when Maisie got him to understand that she had not cast him off, he swore a solemn oath that from that day forward he would be worthy of her. He was so humble, so deeply contrite, so sorrowful in the midst of his overwhelming rapture of gratitude, that presently we began to feel that, perhaps, after all, Edric had been right. Perhaps, after all, the boy, with that curious unerring instinct of his, had judged better than we, and the evil was not so deeply rooted but love would cure it.

"Love—and music," Maud said one day.

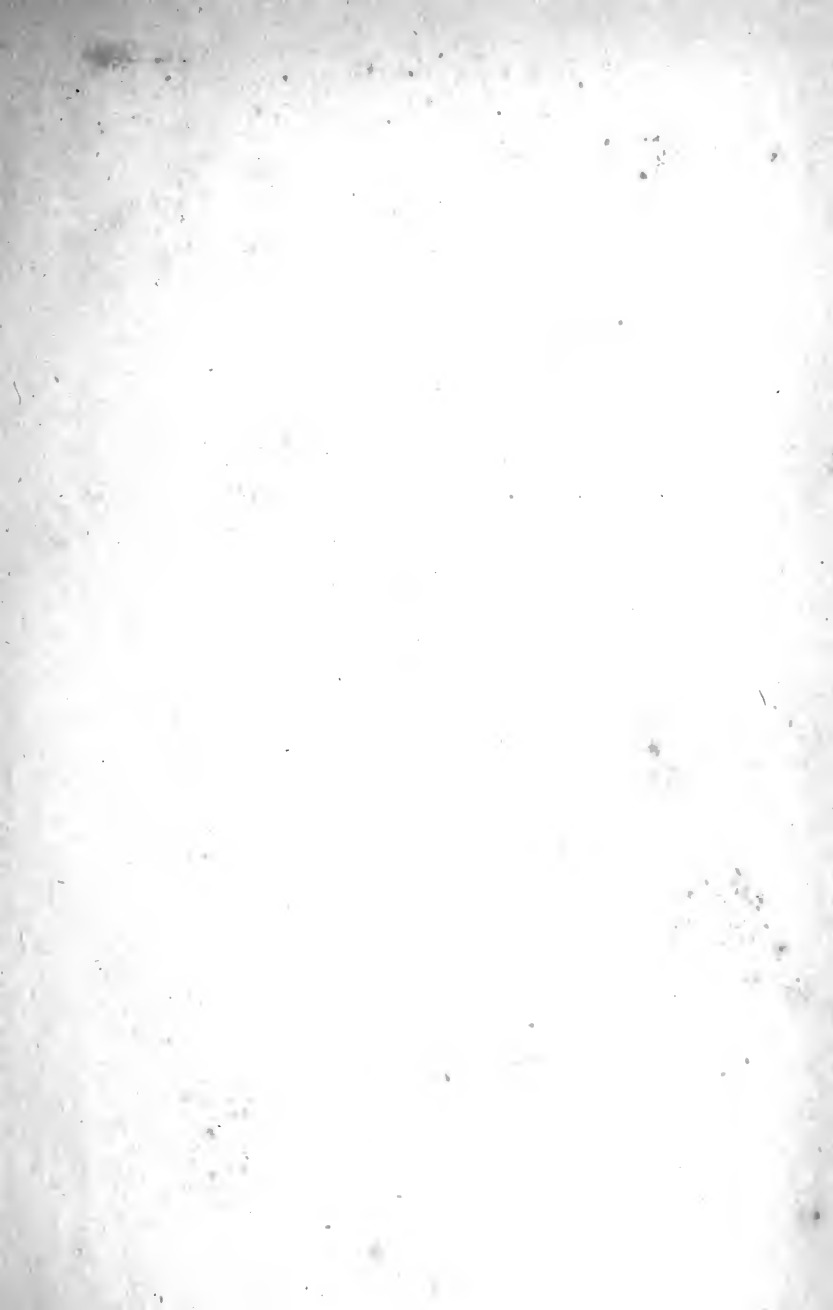
One thing was certain, if womanly patience, and sweetness, and cherishing, and tenderness were still forces in the world, powerful to heal and to keep in health ailing body as well as

erring soul, Rodney would never want for these.

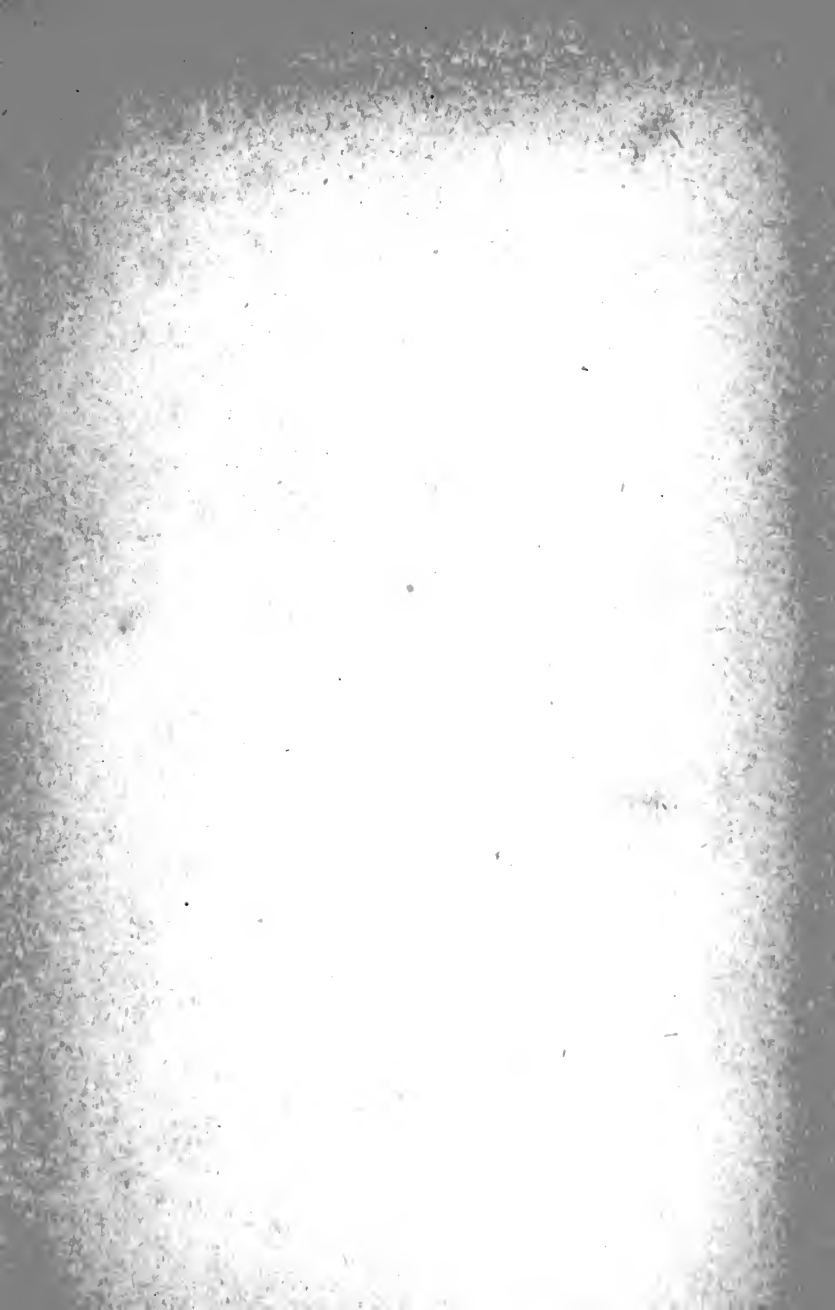
For our Maisie, with the one idea, might very well have said of herself what King Minor one day wrote of himself in clumsy boyish language and graceful boyish distrust of his own tenderness of heart,

“ You know I’m very constant, faithful,” etc.

END OF VOL. I.







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